

The People Side Of Improvement **Success Factors for Sustainable Change**

By KAY SEVER, CMC, CQIA
Sustainable Improvement Consultant & Coach
Connecting People To Performance & Profits



Practice Makes Perfect – Even In Improvement

Shortfall Mining, a subsidiary of Fictional Quarries, Inc., had several active projects on their project list at the end of 2009. The benefits from these projects were included in the 2010 budget. Shortfall's improvement program had been started two years ago. Several man-months were spent documenting Shortfall's mining, plant and shipping processes. New measures and reports had been designed and implemented. Process Improvement Teams had been formed throughout the operation to identify projects that would help improve performance...

"Tom" (a fictional character) was Shortfall's plant manager. Tom had decided that three functional teams would be beneficial for his plant - crushing/conveying, flotation and packaging. All three teams had several projects in process. Data had been gathered and analyzed for most of the projects. Action plans for new procedures had been developed and some were already underway. Before year-end, meetings were held with all the people who were expected to participate in process changes. Project status was reviewed with everyone, cooperation was emphasized, and expectations were set for measurable improvements in throughput, utilization and quality over the next few weeks. According to the consultants that helped direct the implementation, dollars should begin falling to the bottom line shortly.

But...a few weeks passed and the plant's operating stats had not materially improved. Tom had seen this happen before, but was unsure about what to do. His teams were still meeting to review project status, but things had not changed as expected. In the meantime, the improvement update scheduled with senior management was fast approaching.

A few days after the Superbowl, Tom was in his office preparing his remarks and slides for the upcoming meeting with the senior team from corporate. They were coming to Shortfall next week for a site visit. Tom thought about his process improvement teams at the plant and then thought about teams in sports. Tom loved playing (and watching) team sports. He usually rooted for the underdog and was so happy that the Saints had just won their first Superbowl. He had played football and baseball in high school and was now the coach of his son's summer softball team. Before he became the team's coach, they seldom won a game. But last season they had won their league tournament. He was so proud of them. That day he wished he could talk about his team's winning record instead of the performance improvements (or lack of improvements) at his plant.

The traditional steps to improved performance had been taken with disappointing results. What was wrong with this scenario?

- Sports teams are confident in their ability to win games if they practice their plays before a game. Action plans that come out of process improvement those teams are not that much different from plays that sports teams use. In the workplace, we expect people to begin new procedures as soon as they are told to do so. What would happen if we borrowed from sports when managing the "people side of improvement"?

Thought for the month:

When processes change, **participants must abandon their ability to go on autopilot**. Employees with years of experience suddenly feel like new employees – unsure and afraid to make a mistake. Allowing time for practice is a valuable but often missed step in most implementations.

If you want help with “practice”, you would benefit from Kay’s **NEW Management Training Series** called “**Opportunity Fundamentals – Equipment, Cost and Culture**”. This program helps mine and plant management teams solve the kinds of problems discussed above and “**manage change like they manage operations**”. She also implements improvement programs for mining and downstream processing facilities. Kay works with every organizational level and department to find the highest dollar opportunities and remove barriers that prevent sustainable change. She helps management teams lead improvement and better execute the budget, capital approvals, incentive plans, communications, etc. See MiningOpportunity.com for details on her services and contact information. Look for the mining edition of her first book “**Building An Opportunity Culture – Addressing the Barriers That Steal Profits and Prevent Sustainable Change**”, available on her website under Products/Books.