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Unravelling the mystery of 5S

By Kelly Huckabone

The five in a 5S workplace organizational/housekeeping methodology is a Lean Manufacturing tool that includes five steps:

1. Sort
2. Set
3. Shine
4. Standardize
5. Sustain

The 5S methodology is used in many warehouses, depots, and manufacturing sites because the philosophy of keeping the workplace clean and organized improves workplace efficiencies and safety culture, and helps mitigate workplace injuries. Let's walk through each step.

Sort: The first step of 5S, Sort, involves evaluating all the tools, furniture, materials, and equipment in a work area to determine what needs to be present and what can be removed. Removal can include disposal, recycling, or allocation to another person or department. Think about reworking unneeded items.

Set: Once the extra clutter is gone, it's easier to see what's what. During the Set phase, the most logical storage arrangements are determined. This requires thinking through tasks, the frequency of those tasks, and the paths taken through the workspace. An example may include setting aside areas for equipment and items used on a regular basis.

Shine: The Shine stage of 5S focuses on cleaning up the work area, which means sweeping, mopping, dusting, wiping down surfaces, and putting tools and materials away. People are more likely to keep a neat area tidy.

Standardize: The Standardize stage systematizes everything that just happened and turns one-time efforts into habits. This often involves drafting a procedure which outlines where items are located and may include markings, taping, and visual reminders.

Sustain: Sustain refers to the process of keeping the 5S methodology running smoothly and keeping everyone in the organization involved. This includes ongoing communication about the importance of implementing the 5S strategy by demonstrating improved safety statistics and other metrics. Some companies take it one step further and set up a reward program for ongoing commitment to the 5S program.

With so many of us working at home during COVID-19, I decided that my office table needed a 5S workout. During the process, I discovered I had three charging cables.

Here are the before and after pictures:



Benefits of a 5S program include, but are not limited to the following:

- Increased productivity
- Improved safety
- Reduction in waste
- Employee commitment

Companies who adopt a 5S organizational program have a higher safety rate, improved productivity, decreased waste, and positive employee engagement because of the structure and benefits the program brings to the entire organization.

About the Author

Kelly Huckabone is the North American Audit Program Manager who oversees Unity™ Lab Service's internal and external customer and supplier audit programs. Kelly is a certified risk manager, a lead auditor with ASQ, and has been conducting audits for over 25 years for different quality systems, including ISO 9001, 13485, and 17025, as well as Health Canada and the FDA.

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