

## Taking the stress out of kaizen

By Mike Thelen, LEAN Facilitator (*Reproduced here with permission of the author*)

As stressful as kaizen events can be, they are critical to evolving your workforce into a culture that successfully embraces LEAN principles and continuous improvement. The key for any organization is to continue driving forward. A LEAN *sensei* once told me that LEAN has a bias for action. That is, as the teacher explained, if you aren't doing something. You're not continuously improving.

### With that in mind, consider these stress-reducing steps for kaizen events:

**Chose events that highlight an ongoing effort to change the business.** Your approach may be simple, everyday kaizen, but be sure to learn from each event.

**Involve people from all areas and perform activities in all areas.** Perform pre-event planning activities to create understanding and support for the event. During the event, make it special for those who are participating.

**Provide lunches.** This allows you to work through lunch with activities like brainstorming and feedback. If possible, reward the efforts of the team members with items such as t-shirts, cups and pens.

**Develop quick summaries of events to show what was accomplished.** Track the number of improvements to see how far you have come — provide before and after pictures when possible.

**Create goals.** These should drive the changes necessary for creating a new can-do everyday attitude.

**Implement employee suggestions whenever and wherever possible.** And don't let results be hidden or overshadowed by other company activities.

**Create a process to share ideas from one event or department to the next.** This helps to instil that culture for change in every employee.

**Identify “doers” during the process.** Then, provide them with an opportunity to lead, both during and after the scheduled activity. Make sure homework items are identified, posted where they can be seen and completed. Make “doers” responsible for overseeing completion of the assignments.

**Strive for continuous improvement.** Once an area has completed identified actions, challenge them. Ask what can be done better. Continue to drive change and show how change can be fun, improve day to day operations, and be done by anyone anytime.

**About the author:** Mike Thelen is a LEAN facilitator at Aberdeen, South Dakota based Hub City Inc, a subsidiary of the Regal-Beloit Corp. Thelen is also founder of the Aberdeen LEAN Forum, a free forum where business leaders of all aspects of the local economy gather to share, learn and educate. He can be reached at [mike.thelen@regalbeloit.com](mailto:mike.thelen@regalbeloit.com). [This item was originally published in SME – LEAN Directions.]