

THE SIX QUESTIONS OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

A six-step process of structured problem solving and decision making to guide thinking so that both PDCA and hypothesis testing are incorporated into the thought process.

The Six Questions of Continuous Improvement have an interesting history. I first learned about them when I took a course in practical problem solving that was patterned after a Toyota course of the same name. This was approximate 1975. The instructors taught us the Five Questions of Problem Solving, which consisted of the first four questions listed below plus a fifth question, "When can we go see?" Since they are used for both decision making and problem solving, I renamed them the "Five Questions of Continuous Improvement." Later I reworded and expanded question 5 to include the three aspects now listed so it would better address the concept of hypothesis testing, which is integral to operating a lean facility. Also, we always practiced the mantra "learn-do-reflect," and since this always followed the activities of the kaizen, I simply incorporated them into the final question, and now I teach the Six Questions of Continuous Improvement. **They constitute the first and the most important practice that must be incorporated in any lean transformation.** This will be the first skill your champion of problem solving will teach among the Six Initial Skill Focus Areas. Everyone will use the six questions, from those in the C-suite to the operators and mechanics in the field, and they will use them from this day forward. Recall that the questions are:

1. What is the present condition?
2. What is the desired future condition?
3. What is preventing us from reaching the desired condition?
4. What is something we can do, right now, to get closer to the desired condition?
5. When we do this, what should we expect?
 - a. What will happen?
 - b. How much of it will happen?
 - c. When will it happen so we can "go see?"
6. What have we learned?

If you go to the tab on A3 Problem Solving, you will see that the A3 is designed to guide you through this logic. This 6 question format is a method you wish to teach to everyone so this process is automatic.