



## **The Forgotten Role of “Kaizen Champion”**

By Damon Baker

One of the top reasons kaizen events fail to deliver the desired results is "Lack of Leadership Commitment". Unless leaders visibly commit to and actively engage to support the improvements and process changes, it is easy to go back to business as usual.

*"Innovation is anything but business as usual."*

*Anonymous*

Identifying a Kaizen Event Champion is critical to success of the event. Ideally, the Champion is a leader of the business within which the kaizen event is taking place. Having a Champion for an event can also increase buy-in within the business and among upper management, and assist with removing any obstacles in getting the event planned and implemented. This role is especially useful when trying to ensure that team members can get time away from their regular jobs and

responsibilities to participate in the event. The Champion participates at key times during the event and helps with follow up.

The Kaizen Champion should be enthusiastic, committed to the process, willing to take risks, and be open-minded to change and communicate this spirit to the team members. At times it can be difficult to sustain creative thinking and risk taking. The Champion's role is to help inject the team with energy and direction, and to encourage openness to out-of-the-box thinking. Specific responsibilities of the Kaizen Champion include:

- Provide the necessary financial resources for the event.
- At the event kick off, communicate expectations to the team and set the direction of the kaizen event.
- Clearly state that the process that the kaizen team develops during the event will be the new process—the team is not making recommendations.
- State that the Champion will do everything possible to support the new process developed by the team.
- Challenge the team to develop innovative solutions and ideas without introducing preconceived ideas.
- Be visible during the event and provide enthusiastic support of the participants.
- Attend team leader meetings and daily management briefings and provide redirection if needed.
- Assist in removing obstacles.
- Be strategic: use the kaizen event to advance company objectives by improving the performance of the targeted process while being aware of the impact to the total business.

- Attend the final report-out session for the kaizen event to show support and congratulate team members on a job well done.
- Track the status of implementation efforts following the kaizen event to make sure the team continues to make progress and does not go backwards.
- A "kaizen event charter" can be used to confirm the champion's responsibilities and to demonstrate his or her commitment of support.

For a Lean Transformation to truly take hold, Leaders must be humble enough to teach and develop others, embrace a kaizen mindset, see the wastes at Gemba for themselves, and regularly set high expectations, while rewarding performance. However, change does not always have to happen from the top. Get them engaged, show them the way, make it safe for them to learn and engage the kaizen teams. May your next kaizen event be a GREAT success!

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