



Case Study: Rapid improvement

Client: Instrument design and manufacturer

This manufacturer is a market leader with more than 90 percent of the market share in certain segments of their business that faces numerous waste and inefficiency issues as well as missed opportunities.

Among the challenges the manufacturer faces:

- Single person hand assembly of products from start to finish that causes bottlenecks, lengthy delays, the absence of knowledge sharing between areas, a constant fire-fighting mentality to satisfy customer demand, poor work center layout and high levels of WIP inventories without flow
- Disconnect between procurement of needed parts for product assembly and assembly process
- Lost or missing inventory
- The absence of standard work documentation in every area
- A fire-fighting mentality that prohibits supervisors and leads from making improvements and solving issues/problems

Lean Partners created a sense of urgency about change by helping them see the real issues and pressing people to deal with them constructively. The kaizen event provided the opportunity for Lean Partners to help the manufacturer help themselves by facilitating discussions where solutions could surface from the minds of experts. Because the team owned the ideas and the process, they believed in and defended the change.

A new process evolved that allowed the Return Goods department to significantly reduce waste related to the check-in process. The protocol to receive and check-in a product initially took anywhere between 30 minutes and several days. During the weeklong event the maintenance tool room was relocated to allow space for the Return Goods department. The new location was adjacent to the receiving area which reduced wasted steps and motion to process the returned goods. Part of the improvement activities included transforming the room to optimize the work area, removing handoffs, reducing steps and implementing system program changes.

By the end of the week, the time to process a return was decreased to eight minutes. Within 30 days, the manufacturer went from a three-to-five day backlog to next-day processing and eliminated the need for overtime. Management discovered the power of kaizen and witnessed sustainable improvements using the expertise of their own people.