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5S System Streamlines to Build Company Profits

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In today's ultracompetitive environment, businesses need to get their product or service to customers faster than ever. Shorter delivery times aren't just good for customer satisfaction; the longer it takes to get a product from the order desk to the customer, the longer the business waits to be paid. Meanwhile, the company has its own bills to pay, including loan interest and materials invoices. The briefer an order is in production, the better. Knowing this, savvy companies implement lean manufacturing techniques to periodically evaluate their product flow and processes – and adjust as necessary for maximum efficiency.

Keeping it Simple

Companies can sometimes cut production time and eliminate waste by carefully studying how products and paperwork flow through office and manufacturing processes. New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership, or New Mexico MEP, helps businesses refine this flow. The nonprofit organization conducts workshops around the state, one of which – on the 5S System – aims to help businesses improve workplace organization and standardization. The 5S System is just one tool New Mexico MEP uses when assisting businesses with company-wide transformation toward efficiency.

The 5S System is simple but it isn't necessarily simple to maintain. The five s's in the plan's name stand for sort, set in order, shine, standardize and sustain.

Deconstructing Production

When sorting, businesses evaluate every item in the workspace in terms of the value it adds. Items of questionable value to the department or area or production flow are red-tagged and placed in storage for dissemination or disposal.

Items that remain are set in order or placed where they make the most sense in production. Tools used in rapid succession – as on an assembly line – are grouped where they're needed and in proper order. These spots can be temporarily identified using color-coding tools.

The third "s" is shine: A brisk cleaning, repair or full paint job of all items is done to ensure they're ready when needed. Safety matters most when determining which items need repair.

Standardizing refers to determining the safest, easiest and most effective way of performing the job consistently. Standardizing is a work in progress and is constantly reevaluated. Walkways are painted to direct and confine workers to the area of each tool or workspace. The chosen spot for each tool should be outlined in paint so it's easy to find and workers know where to return it after each use.

Sustainability is the final step. Here the business sets guidelines for maintaining the improved system. Guidelines should state how often tools are cleaned and evaluated and where checklists and instructions are posted. The team should set its work standards so they're easy to meet.

Businesses that want help implementing the 5S system or otherwise improving their operational efficiency can contact MEP at 505-262-0921 or visit www.newmexicomep.org. The organization serves businesses throughout the state from its offices in Albuquerque, Roswell and Farmington by bringing together experts in government, the private sector and industry to offer resources that help companies become more competitive.

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