

# 5S for TPMers

*or Improving the workplace makes things better for everyone.*

The so-called 5S activities began when leaders recognized that they needed to instill a sense of pride and ownership into the workplace. The implementation process allowed a great deal of flexibility while providing an overarching structure. The pioneering work rarely mentioned safety as part of this. The inclusion of safety is a uniquely American twist. The originators spoke about the 5S process. Please keep this in mind as you read this article. There is no intention to ignore or downplay the importance of safety. Indeed it is so important that it should not be “embedded” or mixed in with other issues. Safety should be considered first, last and always. Therefore in this article we will discuss the importance and characteristics of the original 5 of the 6S activities.

The 5S Method is built on these 5 Pillars:

- |                 |                                     |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Sort         | Organize                            |
| 2. Set in Order | Orderliness                         |
| 3. Shine        | Cleanliness                         |
| 4. Standardize  | Standardizing cleanup and locations |
| 5. Sustain      | Discipline                          |

Definitions vary but these capture the essence of the 5S process. We know from the experience of others that if we do not get Sort and Set in Order right then the rest of it falls apart. When asked, long term implementers often acknowledge that the two most important activities of 5S are Sort and Set in Order. These two activities are the foundation for achieving zero defects, cost reductions, safety improvements, and zero accidents.

Sort refers to getting rid of what is not needed and keeping only what is needed to produce today’s product. A simple enough concept in the abstract but implementing this in many facilities continues to require considerable effort. When you sort the things in a production area you must make some tough decisions and answer some difficult questions. Is this material needed? What about all these tools? What should be done with the personal stuff like lunch containers, pocket books etc?

Set in Order means that after we have decided what is needed and what is not needed, we must designate a place for everything. Once this is done, searching becomes a rarity. As an example, at home we don’t search for the car keys because we always put them in the same place. This thinking must be applied to our work areas. Tools should always be left in the same place. Also the necessary production material must be delivered to the properly marked location. This requires great attention to detail and rigorous discipline. In our zeal to produce it is tempting to put things in the nearest open space with no thought of the designated area.

Shine means to clean the work area and keep it clean. When asked how he kept his plant so clean, one manager replied, “We don’t get it dirty.” This is a constant battle in many plants. However, there are many examples of creative ways to prevent dirt and debris from accumulating. One thing that stands out is the use of air blow-off. The dust generated by this practice does not disappear, it simply moves to a new location. Then it is blown again and again. Vacuums would significantly reduce the dirt in many factories.

Standardize means to develop a set of rules and guidelines for all to follow. These become a set of expectations of how workers are to behave relative to dirt and clutter in the workplace. These standards are known, practiced and eventually become a way of life in an area. When standards are adhered to then sustaining becomes much easier.

Sustaining means to relentlessly maintain a clean and well-organized work area over time. Historically this has been the most difficult of the 5S. Things degrade, old habits return and workers forget the

standards with the result that everyone conclude that 5S does not work.

The 5S process can be valuable tool set in any plant's drive to eliminate waste in all its forms. Proper implementation is a must as is a relentless focus on adhering to the standards as set by the team. To insure success with 5S it is highly recommended that local management and leaders carry out a periodic 5S audit of the area.

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