

5S Webinar (MSABC) – Participant Questions:

Date: June 13, 2023



Q1: Laying out "homes" for things on the floor looks great. But how do you find space to mark out these dedicated homes when a company is short on floor and wall space? Often many items get stacked into a corner in our workplace where they are not easy to access.

A1: Almost every business is challenged with the perceived lack of sufficient space to properly organize. The first step of 5S is called "sort". In this step, companies remove all extraneous items (aka "junk") from their work area – tools, parts and materials that they don't use on a regular basis. Without fail, businesses are shocked at how much extra space they've gained after the SORT step.

In 2011, Marie Kondo wrote a NY Times best seller "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up". This book is remarkably like 5S – 5S for the home. It recommends cleaning your closet – getting rid of all the clothes you no longer need. My wife and I read this book. Our closet was jammed with clothes. My wife felt she needed everything in the closet. She was a skeptic. After purposely going through everything (just like the 5S "sort" phase) we were both shocked to find 70% of our clothing was redundant. You will have the same epiphany when you complete the sort phase... "did we ever have a lot of junk!"

Q2: If 5S works so well, why do many companies fail to maintain their 5S programs?

A2: When I work with businesses that have tried (and failed) with 5S, I see the same two root causes again and again:

1. Leadership – when senior leaders are not passionate about cleanliness and orderliness, 5S will fail. Leaders often say they want a "new car showroom" kind of business... but they don't want to take ownership and drive accountability.
2. Thoroughness – as mentioned in yesterday's webinar, many businesses are not as thorough as they need to be. They don't throw out their junk, instead keeping "squirrel-piles" throughout the workplace. They make overly simple cleaning check-sheets that are not area-specific. They don't train everyone. They don't create "homes" for critical tools and supplies. They don't create an "address system" that communicates where things must go. They don't clean at the same time every day, instead rationalizing "we'll clean when we get a free moment". For 5S to succeed you must be thorough and disciplined.

Q3: One of the most common criticisms of Lean manufacturing is that it creates more stress on the worker because they feel pressure to do their job perfectly. Can you share your thoughts on this criticism?

A3: This is a frustration of mine that I have dealt with for years. When done properly, Lean *reduces* stress and *improves* morale. The essence of Lean is to eliminate waste – to get rid of all the time consuming, frustrating and non-value adding tasks that drain a company of its joy and vitality. The goal of Lean is to improve efficiency by doing *less*, not more. When I work with businesses I always speak to the CEO and communicate with them that when you do Lean right, morale improves and employees want more. This becomes my personal measuring stick for success. When employees enjoy coming to work – productivity goes up and stress goes down.

Q4: How do you know 5S impacts mental health and employee's well-being? Where is the proof?

A4: It is self-evident that a clean, bright and uncluttered work area where everything you need is right where you expect it positively impacts mental well-being. In her book about the “Magic of Tidying Up” Marie Kondo eloquently describes how becoming clean and organized “sparks joy in your life” and “reduces stress, increases relaxation, and creates a sense of calm and clarity”.

For skeptics that require more proof, a quick Google search reveals an abundance of empirical evidence:

1. Journal of Safety Research (2014) - workplaces that implemented 5S had a significantly lower incidence rate of injuries than those that did not. The study also found that the more 5S practices were implemented, the greater the reduction in injuries.
2. Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (2013) - a clean and organized workplace was associated with a lower risk of work-related musculoskeletal disorders.
3. National Safety Council (2011) - an organized and clutter-free workplace can improve worker morale and reduce stress, which can in turn lead to fewer accidents and injuries. Workers in an organized workplace were more likely to report feeling productive, safe, and engaged in their work.

Q5: Can you share some step-by-step 5S implementation tips?

A5: Certainly.

1. Obtain Management Buy In – don't start 5S unless your senior leadership, ideally your CEO, is just as committed as you are.
2. 100% participation – Businesses that “hit it out of the park” with respect to 5S insist on having everyone participate, not just the line level employees.
3. Institutionalize daily cleaning – Clean at the exact same time, every day – no matter how busy you are. No exceptions. Sound a buzzer 15 minutes before the end of the day that requires *every* employee to clean their work area and return everything to its “home”.
4. Recognize, reward and celebrate the embracement of 5S – When you celebrate and reward desired behaviors, employees will embrace 5S – and your business will become spotless!

Q6: How do you implement this 5S in a food processing facility? Floors are always wet, products are dropped on the floor, and production schedules need to be met. Usually, employees cannot leave the line to clean until they finish their task.

A6: Businesses must make 5S work for their specific needs. In businesses such as you describe, I often prescribe cleaning multiple times a day rather than just once per day. Secondly, I recommend the 5S teams work on identifying improvements that *reduce* water and food spillage. This form of 5S places a greater emphasis on prevention - rather than just daily cleaning. In Lean terminology, these are known as “kaizen” improvements.

I recently toured a large food processing business in Alberta. Although there was some water and food spillage, the place was very clean. This company has a vibrant, active 5S program. My host proudly showed me all their continuous improvement (CI) ideas, many of which reduced the issue of wet, sloppy floors.

5S can (and has) been successfully implemented in all work environments.