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RICK BRIMEYER

Standard Work — the ultimate employee suggestion system

We're all familiar with the wooden box located in the lunchroom entitled "Employee Suggestions." You know ... the one gathering dust. The one where great ideas go to die.

Let's start by identifying the typical pitfalls with employee suggestion systems:

- The process for submitting ideas is impersonal and rife with misunderstanding. Writing is a one-way, shallow form of communication perhaps least favored by most employees.
 - A terrible thing happens as the suggestion slip slides through the slot; responsibility for the improvement transfers from the employee to management. Now it's a matter of whether "they" want to do it.
 - The decision-making process for evaluating suggestions is slow and flawed as it often occurs by managers far removed from the real issue during an agenda-filled monthly meeting, unwilling to leave the board room to investigate it.
 - Feedback to the employee is frequently as slow and impersonal as the submittal and analysis steps.
- So how do we create an improvement system that is more personal, timely and

results in better decisions? Many organizations are finding the secret lies with successfully implementing Standard Work.

Standard Work is defined as the documented (preferably through photos) known best process for completing a critical, repetitive task. It typically contains the following pieces of information required to successfully complete a process:

- A clear definition of the expected output or outcome.
- The sequence of steps in the appropriate order.
- The "stuff" (tools, supplies, information and inventory) needed and the appropriate amount of each.
- The expected time to complete once implemented in an area, Standard Work is the training document for the process, providing training consistency. More importantly, it becomes the baseline against which future suggested improve-



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ments are measured.

In a healthy environment, employees are constantly challenged to use their creativity and knowledge to improve Standard Work. Ideas are discussed with one's supervisor at the place where the work actually occurs. A real-time decision is made together on whether the idea warrants testing and, if so, how an objective, data-based evaluation can be completed. If not, the employee clearly understands that their idea was heard and the criteria for the decision. Regardless of whether their idea is pursued, they are recognized for using their noodle.

If the suggestion indeed results in a better process, the Standard Work is revised to reflect the change and all impacted employees are trained on the revision, thus resulting in an improved process for everyone ... not just the person who had the idea.

Early in 2012 the Environmental Services team at Mary Greeley Medical Center utilized Standard Work to document the known best method for cleaning patient rooms following a discharge. Prior to Standard Work, cleaning process variation was significant due to the number of different workers, different patient units and the fact that almost 200

steps were required to thoroughly clean a room.

Documented results from both in-house testing and patient surveys show a notable improvement in the quality of room cleans. The team also experienced productivity improvements as the average time to clean a room dropped and became more consistent among workers.

But here's the really cool part! Standard Work provided the vehicle for continuously improving the cleaning process. In less than two years, roughly 50 improvement suggestions have been implemented to the cleaning process. That's an average of two improvements per month by a single team on a single work activity – cleaning patient rooms.

Those are numbers few suggestion boxes can match. Imagine that power unleashed across your entire organization.

Rick Brimeyer is the President of Brimeyer LLC, an independent management consulting firm located in Ames which guides organizations to higher performance by focusing on process improvement and leadership development. Further information is available at www.brimeyerllc.com or by calling 515-450-8855.