

Contact: Sue Michaels/Diane Wright
Sierra College Marketing/Public Relations
916-660-7272, 916-630-4535(fax)
smichaels@sierracollege.edu or dwright@sierracollege.edu

Workplace Organization & Visual Controls Improve Productivity

ROCKLIN – Systematic clean-up and re-organization of work stations using Workplace Organization and Visual Controls, or 7S methods, is improving productivity at Sacramento companies. As a result of the Sierra College Center for Applied Competitive Technologies (CACT) offering 7S training for members of the Continuous Improvement Network (CIN), participants are putting what they learned into action. The 7S principles – sort, set in order, shine, safety, sustainability, standardize and sustain -- organize work areas and make employees more productive because it easier to accomplish tasks.

At the Sleep Train (www.sleeptrain.com) distribution center delivery office, employees gained 98% additional space by applying 7S techniques. The 7S team cleared away boxes, unused equipment and other items unnecessary for the work done in that area of the office, explained Frank Rapolla, Sacramento Distribution Center Warehouse Manager. “Not only does it make it look much more organized, employees can quickly find what they need to do their work,” said Rapolla. Two vice presidents participated in the exercise and were encouraged by the results of using this process improvement tool.

Harris & Bruno (www.harris-bruno.com) has grown as a result of continually developing better ways to distribute ink and coatings on large printing presses, according to Courtney Wickens, Human Resources Manager. “The research to create new products is a messy process and often results in spilled ink, left over buckets, tubing and abandoned experimental equipment,” said Wickens. “The 7S team decided to take on the Research & Development room.”

“Employees completely cleaned out the room and sorted the leftovers from experiments into three categories: keep, recycle or throw away, and reconsider within 15 days,” said Wickens. “The engineers developed a new floor plan for equipment and we put yellow tape on the floor to mark where it belonged. A new system for preventing spills was added.” The dramatic transformation has motivated other employees to clean up their work areas and to apply to participate on the company 7S team.

At Progressive Technology (www.prgtech.com) the first step in making engineered ceramics is pressing powder into a solid. The 7S team focused on the pressing area by drawing a diagram that showed the technician’s repeated movements between four different areas explained Gary Broadbent, Production Supervisor. “By tracking the motions, we saw opportunities for improvement by rearranging the work station,” said Broadbent.

Next, they removed everything from the workspace and sorted it. “We cleaned and repainted the floor,” said Broadbent. “The shelf was moved closer to the operator and the powder bags were labeled and organized by diameter so it is easier to find the right size. We also made shadow boxes outlining where tools belong. Now, everything has a place and the space is more ergonomic.”

Carol Rogers, Vice President, Progressive Technology, reported that Zach Kaestner, Press Operator and owner of the area, is very pleased with the results. “Moving equipment closer to the actual work space and eliminating unnecessary items have greatly improved his efficiency,” said Rogers. The project

increased interest in improving all work areas and the company is studying the next area for improvement.

At the CACT 7S training, participants learned methods to systematically make work areas more efficient. For example, as things are removed from an area, each is given a red tag and the item is noted in a log. Criteria are set for sorting items, determining what should be retained and what should be done with other items. In putting the space back together, participants learned visual methods for organizing tools and instructions such as posting photos and layouts. Some class participants visited each other's work sites to learn from their experiences, and everyone shared the challenges and successes of their implementation.

The movement to help Sacramento businesses gain a competitive advantage using 7S, lean and other process improvement methods is supported by the Continuous Improvement Network (www.cacinetwork.com). This is an association of business leaders committed to learning and sharing continuous improvement methods, and touring facilities to see best practices in process improvement.

The Sierra College CACT (www.sierracollege-training.com) is funded through the Workforce and Economic Development program of the California Community College Chancellor's Office. Since 1992, the Sierra College CACT has provided customized training for organizations, manufacturers and technology companies throughout Northern California. Additional information is available at www.sierracollege-training.com or contact Carol Pepper-Kittredge at 916-660-7801 or cpepper-kittredge@sierracollege.edu.

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