

## Sustain Your Gains

Accelerate Improvement, Sustain Gains – The People Side of Six Sigma

*Sustain Your Gains*, by Michael McCarthy, is ultimately a guide to human behavior in the face of change. Although the initial sections of the book serve as a primer to Lean and Six Sigma methodologies, hints of what is to come in later chapters pull the reader forward to see the application of Process Behavior Maintenance (PBM) in action.

If you don't happen to be familiar with Lean and Six Sigma, a few key details will give you what you need to understand them in the context of PBM. The goal of Lean is to reduce waste of time, materials, etc through 'Kaizen' events designed to improve efficiency. Six Sigma, although closely related to Lean, is focused on reducing waste by minimizing variation. As with Lean, undesirable variations may be a result of processes or raw materials. Whether an organization is leveraging either or both of these methodologies, driving out Muda (waste) is the ultimate objective. Keeping waste out in the long term is the focus of *Sustain Your Gains*.

You don't have to be an expert of any kind to recognize that people have a natural tendency to revert to old habits over time without the right encouragement and reinforcement. Many companies are looking to replace old habits with new behaviors in order to improve their results. But in order for the improvements to be sustainable, new behaviors have to become new habits. "When new process behaviors are not built to habit strength, they tend to fade away" (p. 28).

Applications of this idea extend far beyond a traditional manufacturing or assembly scenario to anything from changes in corporate policy regarding purchasing processes to contract compliance challenges.

So what is the answer? How do you *Sustain Your Gains*? Here are a few standout approaches:

Understand the causes of behavior.

"Once we understand the causes of behavior, we can manage those behaviors more precisely, with better results, and with less wasted time on our part" (p. 56).

It is common to think that in order to change a behavior, you need to change the trigger (or antecedent) for that behavior. On the contrary, it is the consequence of the behavior – whether that consequence is positive or negative – that causes the behavior. This is especially true for behavior that an organization wants to be repeated over time.

Use the right kind of reinforcement.

"Negative reinforcement produces 'have to' levels of performance. Positive reinforcement causes 'want to' levels of performance. The 'want to' is what we seek: the consistency and willingness that we can build with PBM" (p. 134).

While a negative consequence in response to an undesired behavior seems like the best way to prevent that behavior in the future, it does not create a drive to perform in the employee. Assuming that the desired behavior is a step in the right direction rather than a cap on performance, managers should look to encourage the best possible results by rewarding good behavior – driving process compliance and maximizing results in the long term.

Communication and Feedback

"Feedback is defined as information about past performance that allows us to improve future performance" (p. 55).

When undesired behaviors are seen, the issue needs to be acknowledged. Depending upon the cause of the behavior (see above) this feedback may take the form of a process reminder, a reiteration of the correct procedure, or an explanation of the consequences of continuing to vary from desired behaviors. The feedback is not intended to be a judgment of the person requiring it, but communication needs to be clear and consistent.

-- Kelly Barner, Co-owner, Buyers Meeting Point

### **About Buyers Meeting Point**

Buyers Meeting Point is an online knowledge and professional development resource for procurement and supply management professionals. Our mission is to support overburdened professionals by making information accessible – by centralizing access to resources on our site, by digesting content and evaluating sources looking for the highest quality information, and by making sure all our coverage is done clearly and simply with no presupposition of pre-existing knowledge or experience. There is a world of information available to you and our site and resources provide an avenue for you to gain market knowledge and expertise from others and to apply them where appropriate for your business. Watch our news articles and blog postings for information on webinars, solutions, research reports, publications and whitepapers being discussed by your colleagues. Make sure you get a well-rounded perspective on procurement by reading our Flip Side content featuring "The Sales Guy". We are convinced you will find something among our resources to assist you with your current challenges. For more information, please visit [www.buyersmeetingpoint.com](http://www.buyersmeetingpoint.com) or email [management@buyersmeetingpoint.com](mailto:management@buyersmeetingpoint.com)