



MOMENTUM IN ACTION: *Learning from the Errors of Our Ways*

The highly respected Toyota Production System and Lean concept both preach that mistakes are treasure, not trash, and we agree wholeheartedly. While we all strive to avoid making mistakes, every error holds a valuable lesson, and if we don't take time to reflect on mistakes, we miss an opportunity to make improvement. Reviewing errors also serves as a great way to let employees know it's okay to admit mistakes and learn from them.

Let's say an employee points out that a packing process for widgets isn't as efficient as it could be. But given that fixing the flaw in the process would only improve it by 10 seconds, the suggestion is dismissed. Now consider if 20,000 widgets are packed annually. If 10 seconds were shaved from packing each widget, the total time savings would be a minute for each 6 items, or more than 50 hours saved for 20,000 items. And we all know time saved is money.

A good example arose when our client, a school supply distributor, discovered a higher than usual error rate when workers fulfilled a choice of upper or lower case wooden letters. In one case, a particular customer asked for capital letters and received lowercase letters twice. After reviewing the picking process, we realized that by revising the process (moving the letters physically farther apart in the warehouse) the problem could be fixed. Traditionally, an employee might have been reprimanded for the redundant error, but by reflecting on the error and addressing the process, the problem was eliminated and workflow was improved.

While employee performance is often a contributing factor to errors, it's only part of the equation. In many cases, you can correct the error and enhance your business by analyzing and improving the process. Good people can usually work with an average process, but just about everyone can work with a good process!

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