

Do You Kaizen?

I was recently asked by a Manager of Manufacturing if I do Kaizen? My foolish reply to him was that "I think Kaizen has taken a backseat to the homerun mentality of the internet." The fact is, whether it be Kaizen or "Home Run Internet Derby", it is NOT up to the strategic planner or any consultant to decide for a company, it is up to the company to decide for themselves, based on what it is they want to accomplish. Most business to business companies are very, if not totally results minded. And every company has its own philosophy for achieving those results. Some want to see slow, consistent and gradual results while others want it all now! As a consultant, I am a firm believer in the Ray Kroc school of management. That extraordinary systems, operated by ordinary people, will not only produce extraordinary results, and will always outperform an ordinary system, operated by extraordinary people. That it is the quality of your systems and processes in place within the company that determine results. With that in mind, a company that wants results can get them, provided they have the right systems and processes in place to achieve them. And companies that focus on their systems and processes first, its people second and results third, stand a far better chance of achieving greater results, because they're initial focus is on the very thing that determines the outcome. Every company works within systems and processes. However, just improving the system or process may simply make you more efficient at doing the wrong thing.

As a CEO, president, owner or as the corporate executive council, you must first identify the business you are in, if you are in the right business, what is the company's purpose, and what are your primary competencies. Then you need to identify the systems and processes that already exist within the company. Take an objective look at how things actually flow and happen throughout your company. Based upon the results you want to achieve, you change, alter, modify, fix, eliminate, renew and/or replace them. Too, you must be honest enough with yourself to ask, "are the results we think we want achievable?" "If they are, how much money and resources will we have to allocate to it to make it happen?" And finally, "Is it worth it?"

Ray Kroc understood that it took systems and processes to make McDonald's

successful, but he also understood it still required people, ordinary or not, to run them. The reason he was less concerned about the talent who did the work, than he was the systems and processes in which they operated, was that the systems and processes ensured extraordinary results. The systems and processes he had in place were his assurance that his people would be well trained to do their job. They would be given the tools needed to ensure repetitive and continuous success, have the support of and encouragement from management, be provided with the parameters of their empowerment, asked to make suggestions and provide input. What's more, they would be allowed to make the right judgements concerning the customer and the establishment during that "moment of truth" with the customer, based upon their training and the overall culture and value of the company.

So, do I do Kaizen? No. Nor do I do Homerun Internet Derby. Through the strategic planning process, every company can decide for itself where it wants to go, what it wants to achieve, how it expects to achieve it, what it will have to do to achieve it, who is expected to do what, who is accountable for what and to whom, with what and how much authority, by when must what be accomplished and in what time frame. As a strategic planning consultant, I can only ask the questions, challenge the creators of the plan and cause them to see and think clearly, honestly and openly in order to deal with the reality of the situation. Get them to identify the systems and processes currently in place, get them to ask why they are in place and determine whether or not they need to be changed, renewed, altered, replaced or eliminated. Get them to see the "real" culture in which they do business and how they really treat their employees. Get them to see the "real" way decisions are made, authority is given and power is entrusted. Then determine for themselves, based on fact, not fiction and rhetoric, what the plan is for taking them from where they are now to where it is that they want to be.