



### The Problem

At a large multinational manufacturing business the Australian Managing Director had implemented a 5S program to improve the productivity and safety performance of the sites across the country. After a year, no noticeable improvement had been observed. The business wanted to improve things.

### Start with why

5S is a program that is designed to reduce waste and increase productivity through a 5 step cycle. Everyone on all sites had undertaken basic training and so knew the words and could even recite the benefits of the program in terms of bottom line return to the organisation and overall safety statistics.

So what was the problem?

Like many good initiatives the people who were asked to implement the program had not been asked whether they understood the benefits to them. WIIFM had another victim; the “What’s in it for me?” question.

At the end of the day, people just went through the motions of audits and, as long as nobody put in too much effort, it simply seemed that things were as good as they could be. Middle management could then get on with “more important things” as they said to me.

The Managing Director offered a prize to the team with the highest 5S audit score at the end of the year. A dinner with the MD and his wife.

For the next month’s audit, no change in results could be seen. It was at this point that I was called in. My first suggestion (delicately...) was to change the prize to movie tickets.

### Our Conclusion

Measuring audits and providing metrics is often a useful thing to drive change. This works if people see that change is both possible and desirable. To them. Although the MD and his wife are lovely people, this wasn’t as motivating to staff as it was perhaps intended! Audits themselves are also seldom as motivating as a team working together and seeing things get easier; seeing things that are personally frustrating diminish or disappear. 5S as a program is not about the audit score. It is about improving productivity and safety, as well as creating a culture of doing things well together.

### Make it personal



The team that I was given to manage had limited knowledge of what benefit 5S could be.

I started by asking some simple questions about whether people could

always find the tools they needed, or whether the equipment was always in a state ready to be used rather than dirty and in need of either calibration or fixing.

The laughter was all I needed to understand that they had the very issues that 5S was designed to deal with.

I told them that this month we would forget the audit and just focus on making sure that we removed anything from the workspace that we didn’t need, and set up spaces with the tools they needed in that spot. To their credit, they had some fun doing it, joking at how old and useless some things they found were.

The next month we cleaned the area. From top to bottom. We also calibrated the equipment and replaced broken parts. It was encouraging to hear people start to talk about how much easier their jobs were.

Without prompting, the team created a simple routine that they would follow at the end of each day, making sure that everything was ready for the next morning.

The Managing Director awarded movie tickets to that team as clear winners that year. The team was also awarded a special commendation for their incredible productivity improvements and asked to share their approach with the whole business.

