

## 3 Ways to Make Lean More Visual

*Our thanks to Brady for allowing us to reprint the following article.*

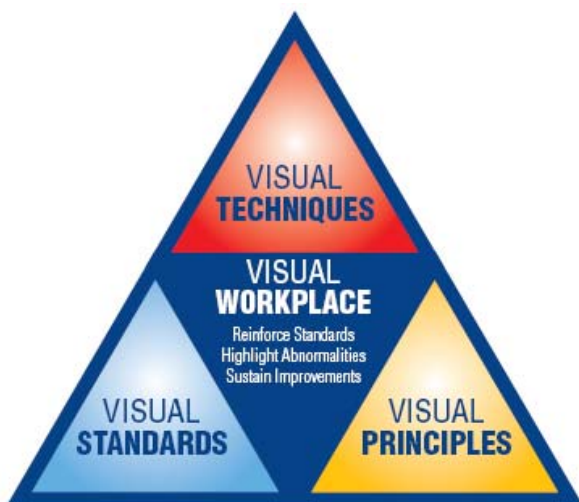
Visuals are a key component of many lean manufacturing techniques, including 5S Workplace Organization, Standard Work, Total Productive Maintenance (TPM), Kanban Pull Production, and other continuous improvement methods.

In fact, visuals are now considered an essential component of any successful lean manufacturing initiative. They are proven to effectively reinforce standards, and help your staff and employees detect abnormalities at a glance. Most lean experts agree: the more visual your facility is, the more likely you are to sustain your lean improvements.

In this whitepaper, we'll show you three ways that you can start to incorporate visual concepts and techniques into your existing lean activities:

1. Incorporate visual thinking in existing kaizen or rapid improvement events
2. Dedicate kaizen events to enhancing the visibility of a specific work area or process
3. Instill visual thinking into lean daily management practices.

### 1. Incorporate visuals into existing lean events



The most common approach to creating a visual workplace is to incorporate visual concepts and techniques into your facility's existing lean events. A typical lean event, or kaizen blitz, focuses on improving the operations of a specific work cell, process or piece of equipment. An event may last three to five days, and involve employees from the target area, as well as other support personnel, such as maintenance and engineering. These lean events present the ideal situation for visual thinking! Use the opportunity to teach your employees visual principles, standards and techniques.

**Visual Principles:** Begin by training employees on visual principles and best practices. Employees need to understand that waste is oftentimes a result of information deficits: people simply don't have the information they need to do their jobs efficiently and effectively. Visuals are the best way to eliminate such information deficits.

**Visual Standards:** Team members also need to be instructed in the specific visual standards employed in the facility. If you do not have visual standards already established, include creating such standards as an objective for the event. Take time to review each type of visual to be used (e.g. 5S marking, standard work procedures, safety signs) and clearly define how they should look (format, color usage, etc.). Document the new design standards in a log sheet or series of one point lessons, and make sure these guidelines are applied consistently throughout the plant in all future lean activities.

**Visual Techniques:** It's equally important to train team members on the tools, supplies and techniques for creating visuals. For example, if you have a label printer available on the premises, use the event to ensure everyone knows how to use it (or who to go to if there is a designated person providing such support). This training not only facilitates the event, but also enables employees to update and replace the visuals in the future.

## 2. Hold kaizen events to enhance the visibility of a work area or process



Have you already introduced lean practices in certain areas of your facility, but are having difficulty sustaining those improvements? Consider holding a lean event solely dedicated to improving the “visuality” of the area. Oftentimes these issues can be resolved by ensuring that the proper standards and work methods are clearly posted at the point of need.

Like other lean events, a visual workplace event typically spans several days and involves the team members who operate in the target area. It should include classroom training and “go see” observation, as well as root cause and problem solving activities. The most effective visual workplace events involve team members in the hands-on implementation and transformation of the area, with the specific goal of making the area more information rich.

This type of visual workplace event not only provides training on visual principles, standards and techniques, but it also instills a greater level of know-how and skill in the participants because visuals are the focus of the event.

The most successful visual workplace events identify the key information deficits in the work area, process or cell, and then create visual devices that resolve them. To structure these events, your team can reference a checklist of common visual categories or applications (e.g. safety visuals, process visuals, material flow visuals, equipment car visuals, etc.). Dr. Gwendolyn Galsworth also describes another effective way to identify information deficits in her book *Visual Workplace, Visual Thinking*. She suggests having team members think about two questions: “What do I need to know?” and “What do I need to share?”

## 3) Instill visual thinking into lean daily management



Many of today’s companies are moving away from an event-based approach to lean; instead, they are incorporating lean activities and improvements into daily work routines on the shopfloor.

This lean implementation style, which is often called “lean daily management,” offers a number of advantages. It helps ensure that your lean efforts remain ongoing and continuous. It also helps to enhance sustainment, as there is less chance of losing focus.

Visual thinking should be properly positioned within the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle. Just like the 5Y technique is used for root cause analysis, visual workplace principles and techniques should be used for the countermeasure planning process. Employees should be required to explicitly specify what methods they will use to communicate the change and reinforce the new standard in the work area. Posting visuals at the point of need is one of the most effective ways to do this. Therefore, it makes sense to ensure visual best practices are incorporated into the training and tools that are prepared to help employees design and implement countermeasures.

