



Why Is This Here?

By Miles Free, Director, Industry Research and Technology

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Member Profile...continued

machining companies are a big part of our market. We got to know many of our current customers through our technical membership in PMPA."

Mr. Mulligan credits many of his customer relationships to PMPA's networking opportunities. "You really get to know your customers on a personal level at the association meetings and conferences," he explains. "It's much better than doing business by phone, fax and e-mail.

"I like the exposure to some of the members' best practices," he continues. "Even though we're in a different industry, there are many things we can learn from the best people in the PMPA. We try to emulate some of those practices."

Mr. Mulligan, who currently serves on the PMPA Technical Program Committee, is a user of the PMPA Listserves. "I contribute when there's something that relates to carbon and alloy steel, which is our business," he says. "I try to give an answer when I can. If there's something that our sister company, A-Lab, can help a member with, I try to offer those services as well.

"There are customers we wouldn't have without PMPA membership," Mr. Mulligan sums up. "I think PMPA members try to support the technical members and favor them with their business when it makes sense. There are definitely customers that value the fact that we are PMPA members."

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Why is this here? Will I use it this minute? Will I use it this hour? Will I use it this shift? Will I use it today? Why is this here?

These questions are one of two essential principles to help you establish "Lean" in your operations. It is a principle that will work regardless of whether your shop is low-variety, high-volume (LVHV—like Toyota Lean) or high-variety, low-volume (HVLV—like most job shops).

The other principle, "Relentlessly eliminate waste," is the better-known principle. It tells you what needs to be done. But asking "Why is this here?" shows you how to eliminate waste. It is the essential question to ask when removing clutter from workspaces, thereby reducing potential variability and restoring your operations to the essentials needed for control and visual management.

Why is this here? This question used to be the province of the industrial engineer. A company's industrial engineers would plan the set-up of an operation, calculate standard work and determine the best layout for production. I have not seen an IE in any contract shop, nor in the plants of our OEM customers in many, many years.

In order to get "lean and mean" or "right sized," most executive managers eliminated such non-essential luxury positions as industrial engineers. So facilities got bloated with substandard layouts. And by not having standard work, more and more extra "stuff" was brought into the production environment. With foremen, crew or team leaders all overburdened by just keeping our shops on schedule, the idea of keeping work areas optimized for production has taken a back seat to the urgencies of the moment.

Why is this here? Will I use it this minute? This is the question to ask when you look at a production workspace. (Creative workspaces are different.) The most expensive real estate is the limited square footage at the workstation where the employee and process interface. Any material, equipment or other tangibles that are not needed to accomplish the task are obstacles and create a sub-optimum environment for accomplishing the work at that time and place.

Why is this here? Will I use it this hour? Will I use it this shift? Tools, gages and equipment that are used regularly but not as a part of every operator task should be near at hand, but not jammed into an area where they are in the way. A visually marked place to hold the tool will help assure that it gets returned once it has completed its task.

The idea of keeping our work areas optimized for production has taken a back seat to the urgencies of the moment.

Why is this here? Will I use it today? If the resource is only used once a day, that's a likely signal that it might be shared and used by others. So, finding the best place for it (rather than just leaving it where it happened to be used last) will optimize for the entire organization. The time spent by others searching for a shared resource is an unrecoverable loss to the company.

Why is this here? If the answer is anything other than "because it is needed to help perform the job at hand better, safer or with better quality," then the item should be removed.