

## How Do You Know What To Do Next?

Do modern, quality tools provide an answer?



How do you know what to do next? Seriously. Do you follow specific work instructions? Standard work? A process flow chart? Just habit? What if the usual stimulus is not present? How do you decide what to do next?

Theodore Roosevelt isn't quoted or often remembered these days, but my grandfather shared a quote that is often attributed to Teddy: "In any moment of decision, the best thing that you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing." So, let's just consider this quote and see how it can apply to our work, and our shops' success.

### The Best Thing That You Can Do Is The Right Thing

Well, that seems obvious. Do the right thing. Ok. What is the right thing to do? In this exact moment, how will we know? That is the issue. How do we know, judge or determine what is the right thing to do?

"In the first place, do no harm," comes to mind, providing us a guard rail or signpost on what we should or shouldn't do. If it doesn't protect the customer —

the entity that brings our business demand — then it is clearly the wrong thing to do.

But doing no harm could also be taken as an instruction to do nothing. And that, Teddy states, is the worst thing. So, we need more than just a prohibition on doing harm. Operating at our highest and best use is one of my

foundational principles. This tells me to do, but not what to do. We can do things

that are within our scope — our responsibilities and authorities. But what to do?

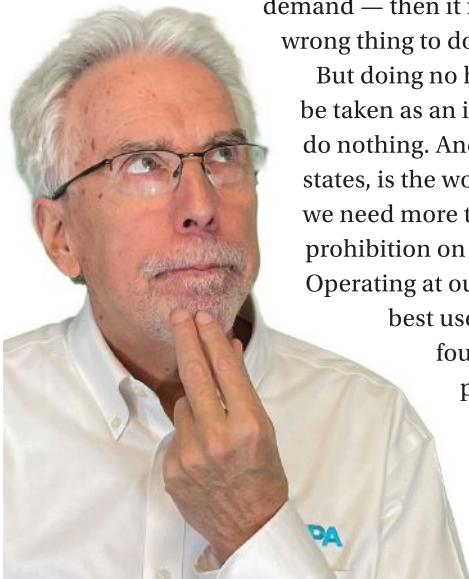
This is where the tools of quality really help. Standard work tells us the What, the When and the How. Standard work is by definition the current best practice for performing a process. When combined with the practice of continuous improvement, it will answer the question that most entrepreneurs mistakenly ask when trying to decide what to do next... "What can I do that will make me the most money?" This is absolutely the wrong question, as shown by how it worked out when employed by the folks at Enron. We all know how that ended.

After the standard work is completed, perhaps your organization has (or needs) standing instructions. "If you have time to lean, you have time to clean," was the motto at one of my early jobs. It stands the test of time and I wonder what other similar wisdom might be added to make a list of standing instructions for our precision machining shops?

When I set out to write this piece, I was sure that "do the next best thing" would be the inevitable conclusion. But Teddy's dictum — "doing the wrong thing is better than doing nothing" — gives me pause. In my world, we are performers not employees, and our pay is compensation for our performance. To perform is to do something, not for us to do nothing. And certainly not for us to do the wrong thing.

So back to the initial question how do we know what to do next? In our shops, the ERP, the scheduling software, the foreman or the production planner will generally have this covered. But those moments between jobs, projects and assignments...how do we know?

On our PMPA Mastery Program visits last year, we visited several shops that were practicing not 5-S, but 6-S. What is 6-S? Well, in the United States, we all know "safety first," so add to that the 5-S method — Sort. Set in order. Shine. Standardize. Sustain. Takes that "time to lean, time to clean" to another level, indeed. So perhaps,



as shown on the shop tours we made, 6-S is indeed our industry's standing instructions.

The initial question was how do we know what to do next? My anticipated answer was "do the next best thing." Perhaps when we are not at work that answer will do. But frankly, it seems vague and also highly dependent on one's own values. But having reflected on this, I am certain that when no other work has been assigned, following the 6-S method in the area for which we have responsibility just might be that "next best thing." What do you think? I would love to get your take (my email is below.) **P**

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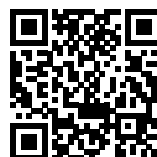
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*(Oh, and chips and dip)*



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