



Why 5 S's are the basics of cost efficient manufacturing.

Perhaps, because the 5's system seems so simple, it is often the most ignored. And yet, like all things simple, it is incredibly effective. So many companies I walk through have at some stage initiated this programme and yet have been unable to find the energy to sustain it for any length of time. A great pity!

5's is a spiritual adventure! As we progress through the implementation of 5's, we automatically clear the accumulated debris from within our own self, effectively opening up new avenues of understanding.

This is the way 5's was intended to be used. It comes to us from a deep tradition of Japanese culture where orderliness and cleanliness are held as divine qualities. Which they are in any mans language! When we (westerners) ignore this tradition in favor of physical appearance only, the system then has no depth and risks a shorter life.

Firstly, let's look at the 5 Japanese words; four out of five of them start with the letters 'SEI'. This is no fluke either. The prefix means 'righteous' or put another way, virtuous, moral, upright and honest. Not bad qualities to build upon in our industrial families. In South Africa right now, we're talking about Moral Regeneration and so in its own way 5's can help in supporting this superior way of working.

5S is an ordered way of work life. Organizations big and small depend on order to bring about a condition whereby everything is in its right place and functioning properly.

If left to their own devices, organizations will naturally tend to regress from order to disorder and possibly even chaos. Unless there are systems in place to prevent the downward slide, work life will deteriorate. That is a universal law!

5S uses an interlinked, Five Level system to address the various functional areas within the organization. It is not just house keeping. For example, the 5xS's stand for:-

- ❖ **Seiri or Organisation.** This first step considers the type of work at hand and the tools and equipment needed to do the work. It also looks at dispensing with unnecessary inventories, machines, documents and systems that do not add value. For example, look around your work environment and seriously question the need to hang on to obsolete equipment or machines that have not been used for six months or more. Unused items collect dust and create lethargy. Send them to the metal merchants! By re-organizing the physical we automatically rid our own lives of burdens.
- ❖ **Seiton or Orderliness.** Once the ground has been cleared, leaving behind only that which is necessary, put things in a place where they belong so that everyone in the organization can find them and return them to the same place! Shadow marking for tools on a peg board, indicating areas where reworks are

held or pallets are stacked by clear signage does your company proud in the eyes of a customer and saves employee time by knowing where to look first time.

- ❖ **Seiso or Cleanliness.** This has a powerful knock on effect in favor of better quality as it increases the maintenance factor of keeping the work place clean and finds proactive means of preventing the mess from occurring in the first place. Safety and clean work areas go together so lost time accidents reduce accordingly.
- ❖ **Seiketso or standardization.** Making sure each person works in the same way by working to common methods within the organization means better quality through standardized practices. Many companies work multiple shifts to get the best return on their investment but, it is generally left to the operator who dictates that method. Standardised working means each of the shift operator's work to the exact same method, not their own interpretation of it.
- ❖ **Shitsuke or Discipline.** Self-control and orderly conduct of the individual in the organization means fellow workers live a work life that is relatively free from burden. When an organization takes on the 5S system it establishes a platform of discipline upon which other, perhaps more demanding systems may be founded.

There are many excellent books available as well as easily accessible internet downloads on this subject. Good luck if you are just starting out.