



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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The Basics of the ‘5-S’ Practice

The “5-S” practice is a well-recognized methodology used to improve the work environment. Once used primarily by the Japanese, this concept is quickly gaining popularity in many Western countries. It has evolved into a formal technique that is useful not only for improving the physical environment, but also for improving Total Quality Management (TQM) processes. Adopting this practice could solve many everyday problems. In fact, many companies use parts of the “5-S” in their daily routines without being aware that there is a formal technique.

The term “5-S” represents five words in Japanese: Seiri, Seiton, Seiso, Seiketsu, and Shitsuke. The English equivalents for these words are Structure, Systemize, Sanitize, Standardize, and Self-Discipline. In other words, these “5-S” terms refer to Organization, Neatness, Cleaning, Standardization, and Discipline.

Structure / Organization (Seiri)

Organization refers to separating items that are essential to the job (such as tools, parts, and materials) from those that are not. Basic organization can be accomplished by:

- Discarding unwanted (red-tagged) items
- Organizing parts, files, and other occasionally used items in storage
- Placing the most vital items in convenient locations
- Dealing with the causes of defects, noise, and leaks
- Treating defects, leaks, and breakages
- Aiming for a “one is best” policy, for instance one-location filing, one-stop service for customers, etc.

Systemize / Neatness (Seiton)

Neatness reduces the time it takes to locate or store items. A neat work area can also lead to an increased feeling of pride and ownership in the work being performed. To accomplish this step, focus on:

- Clearly designated names and places
- Functional placement of parts, tools, and materials
- Quick (30-second) and easy retrieval of documents, parts, and tools
- Neat and easy-to-read notice boards (with special attention paid to the removal of old and obsolete boards)
- Filing standards and controls
- Arrangement for first-in, first out

Sanitize / Cleaning (Seiso)



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In addition to being neat or orderly, the physical environment should also be clean. This involves assigning cleaning duties and responsibilities to specific individuals. If a working environment is clean and remains clean, individuals will all start to chip in to maintain the cleanliness. This instills a sense of pride. It's hard to do quality work, and it is hard to feel good about your work, in a dirty and unkempt environment. To be effective, the clean environment must be stressed and reinforced. This can be accomplished by:

- Assigning specific cleaning responsibilities to specific people
- Adopting simple methods for cleaning and inspection
- Regular and thorough cleaning activities

Standardize (Seiketsu)

This element emphasizes the continual reinforcement of the organization, cleanliness and neatness characteristics. By following standard guidelines, employees better understand the working environment and work within it quickly and safely. Standardization includes:

- Certification of inspections using labels, tags, etc.
- "Danger" warning marks and signs
- Color coding of files, pipes, and containers
- Directional markings on pipes and gangways

Self Discipline / Discipline (Shitsuke)

Discipline, the most difficult step in the "5-S" practice, involves instilling the defined rules and regulations into the day-to-day working culture of the organization. To accomplish this, emphasize that people should:

- Follow all safety rules, such as wearing safety helmets, gloves, and shoes while at work
- Execute individual responsibilities
- Communicate effectively
- Practice dealing with emergencies
- Understand, check and follow "5-S" practices

Summary

Many successful organizations have found that after developing a high quality work environment and instilling discipline in the form of procedures and work instructions, employees devoted more energy and time to achieve results. The "5-S" practice has now become a highly appreciated technique in business, which helps not only by impressing the customers, but also by establishing effective quality processes for good services and products.