

## *Why All the Excitement Around Kaizen Events?*

What's up with all the questions about Kaizen events? Apparently there is something, because more and more organizations have been asking about information on how to perform one. They seem to think it's some kind of advanced all day meeting but with fanfare. So when asked how to conduct a *Kaizen* event, my response is always, "Are you really ready to make the commitment? .....Have you prepared the attendees for what is about to happen to them?" I ask because most organizations do not fully appreciate the investment required to pull off such an extremely orchestrated affair.

If Kaizen events are new to you, here is a quick description: A true *Kaizen* Event is a coordinated 2 – 3 day event attended by process owners, sponsors and subject matter experts of a particular process with the purpose of making improvements to that process immediately. It's about having the undivided attention of key decision makers and those who do the work in the same room with the intent of coming up with a realistic plan for improvement. It's about getting together, discussing the challenge, determining the solution and then coordinating the plan to fix the problem.

The *Kaizen* strategy aims to involve the team, to use analytical tools to identify opportunities and to quickly design improvement efforts which eliminate waste. The team works to implement chosen improvements rapidly (often within 72 hours of initiating the *Kaizen* event), typically focusing on solutions that do not involve large capital outlays.

In my experience, a *Kaizen* session is the perfect event. It's not a backyard barbeque, it's a debutant ball. You need to treat this like it's the social event of the season. You must pick a date when you can confirm all the key players will be in attendance, no exceptions; so you may need to plan as much as 3 - 6 months out. The day of the event you must make sure the Master of Ceremonies has his agenda in place, the music is queued for the perfect moment, and the champagne is poured with precision. Everything must be flawless. And to do this, it takes months of hard planning and major organization.

Why the dramatic explanation? Well, because if you're going to introduce *Kaizen* practices into your organizational culture, I want you to be prepared. You will need to plan with the intent of executing a session, with the hope of implementing immediate improvements that will yield amazing results. Basically, you will need to have your stuff in order. So here's a short recipe to get you started:

**Plan & Prepare:** The follow is a partial check list of things you will need in order to set up a Kaizen event.

- Book the Location
- Invite Attendees/Confirm their Attendance
- Create an Agenda (don't forget to build in short bathroom and eating breaks)
- Establish when the sponsor will appear throughout the day for decision making purposes or opportunities (mid day, end of day)?

- Determine what data will need to be available in order to make decisions (data files, process maps, files, etc)
- Set up data center for use during session (lap top, printers, paper, etc) computers used during the session should not have access to email.
- Prepare facility with post-it notes, colored dots, white boards, flip charts, markers, pens, paper, printing supplies, overhead projector, back-up bulb, etc.
- Determine the Role of Each Attendee
- Determine What Must Be Accomplished Each Day
- Determine Ground Rules for the Session
- Determine How Decisions Will Be Made (senior most person, consensus, majority vote)

If you don't have the answers to these questions....find them before moving forward.

**Execute the Session:** As any great project manager knows, great meetings do not happen by themselves. When the day arrives and attendees show up for a prompt Kaizen start, make it clear what will and will not happen over the course of the 2 – 3 day period. This is not the time or the place for being vague or chatty. Cut to the chase; post the rules, post the expectations, post the goal, so everyone can see them. It is recommended to start by reviewing the agenda and reading out loud the ground rules, expectations, goals, and commitment statement. It should end with action plans in place, marching orders ready for each participant; and a roll out schedule for making improvements happen immediately.

Executing the session means running a well oiled machine and planning for every possible contingency. (Performing an FMEA in the planning stages never hurts) But regardless of what improvements are made, the list below represents the most basic tools the team should complete during the session:

- Finalize a Communication Plan
- Design a Training Plan
- Finalize an Action Plan with Responsibility Assignments
- Finalize a Marketing Plan/Image Plan
- Determine What's In/What's Out (part of an overall scope plan or multi-generational project plan)
- Finalize the Implementation Plan (the who, what, where, when, how)

**Implementing Results:** The day after a Kaizen event has ended the team should be prepared to make change happen and implement new process improvements. Remember: Kaizen is about making continuous process improvement so don't expect to solve world hunger in these short but intense sessions. Walking out of a Kaizen session is about implementing improvements that are within the teams control, are impactful to those in the process, and empowering the team to take next steps on the continuous improvement spectrum. But don't forget, the team must incorporate some kind of follow-up activity that aims to ensure that improvements are sustained, and not just temporary.

As an overall statement, I strongly encourage you to find someone who knows how to guide you in the up front work, can prepare you and your team for the 2 – 3 day event, and can supervise the efforts for putting the solution into play. Kaizen events are very much like a formal wedding,

it's simply best to leave the planning and preparation to a professional wedding planner so the wedding party can be left to have a good time.

***Joy E. Taylor*** is an Owner/Partner of TayganPoint Consulting Group, LLC and a Certified Master Black Belt and a Kaizen Facilitator.

[www.tayganpoint.com](http://www.tayganpoint.com)