

The Issue: An Illinois food manufacturing facility was experiencing significant downtime on a very profitable line. SKU proliferation caused by line extensions necessitated more frequent changeovers of the line, which deposits food into a bag and then packages the bag for shipping. As the product category grew, the variety (shape and size) of the bags grew, lengthening the changeover time. Because of the profitability of the line, it was necessary to find a way to accommodate the SKU growth while minimizing the changeover time.

The Solution: A three-day kaizen blitz was conducted. The plant assembled a cross-functional team of front line workers to participate. After basic training, where the team learned of the Eight Deadly Wastes (defects, overproduction, waiting, neglected associate creativity, transportation, inventory, motion, extra processing), the team was ready to go. We hit the floor and the team videotaped and timed the “current state” changeover.

On day two, the team huddled in the “war room” and dissected the videotape, identifying and discussing how to eliminate each waste we saw. Some activities were eliminated, some were conducted prior to the changeover, and some were conducted in different sequences. We also transferred activity from an overloaded associate to an idle associate already on the line. Mechanics went to work and simplified all adjustments, so a minimum of tools and expertise was needed for the “future state” changeover.

On day three, we documented and agreed upon the new process, and our roles in the changeover. We then conducted the new changeover using our newly developed process, created by the people who already “owned” the work.

The Results: The “current state” changeover, which we filmed on day 1, was done in 150 minutes. On day three, our new changeover took 49 minutes. We surpassed our 50% goal, eliminating 67% of the downtime. This reduction in changeover represents an increase in uptime of several hours per week, on a highly profitable line. The team, which didn’t originally think a 50% improvement was attainable, was ecstatic, and remained engaged, continuing to offer suggestions of further improvement.



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