
Arresting Waste in the Office of the Sheriff

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The Office of the Sheriff is the combined law enforcement agency of Duval County and Jacksonville, FL. It's arresting something different — the waste in its century-old bureaucracy. Continuous Improvement based on lean thinking is gathering momentum. It's still novel to many employees, but they have halted a dramatic amount of waste already. The intent is to create a working culture of endless vigilance against waste in law enforcement.

The Sheriff's Department's lean journey began from reflecting on a scam it uncovered in 2004 in the forfeiture department, where confiscated property is held. If legitimate ownership cannot be established, the stuff is sold, including big-ticket items like vehicles. Annual proceeds are sizeable. An employee trickling cash from these proceeds into his personal kitty for years had accumulated a \$500,000 retirement cushion. This story fascinated the Jacksonville media. It didn't boost pride inside the Office of the Sheriff.

John Rutherford, the new incumbent sheriff, sought a fundamental change in modus operandi. Adding a few more rules to a department already hidebound with them was unlikely to preclude future scam opportunities. Rules and directives may even codify waste in the procedures dictated, and they take time to update, dissemi-

nate, and police. If voluminous, no one can remember or follow them all anyway. Actually, waste, messiness, and delays create opportunities for surreptitious behavior. The Office of the Sheriff had to break out of this shell and view the problem differently.

Maxine Person, the internal auditor studying the conditions that permitted the forfeiture scam, had an inspiration. Her husband happened to be deeply involved in lean processes at his company, Jacksonville Electrical Authority, a member of the Jacksonville Lean Consortium. She thought that this way of working might drain profligate waste from the Sheriff's Department too, and make future embarrassments less likely. Sheriff Rutherford "stuck a toe in the water" to try this. In 2005, Maxine began to teach eight-hour classes on lean methods. Some projects were promising, but a lone part-time instructor wasn't making a dent

In Brief

Jacksonville, FL has the first known law enforcement agency in the United States to eliminate waste from its operations with Continuous Improvement. It is far from being completely implemented, but results so far are dramatic. This initiative could become a path breaker for other law enforcement agencies.

in a 3000-person department. The Office of the Sheriff joined the Jacksonville Lean Consortium. The toe in the water became a deep plunge.

To convert the entire Office of the Sheriff, Rutherford created a Continuous Improvement Division including a two-person Continuous Improvement Unit for training and development. It's now staffed by a couple of lean zealots, Lt. Randy Russell and Coordinator Renea Chandler. They began a steady schedule of classes followed by applying them to waste-reduction projects. They simplified class work to four-hours emphasizing basics: process mapping, work layout, identifying the seven wastes, standard work, and 5S, which in the department stands for Sort, Straighten, Shine, Standardize, and Sustain. People eliminate everything not needed from their work area and organize everything needed in a standard place. That creates work status visibility so everyone can see the work pattern. Anything out of place attracts attention without having to communicate about the obvious. But most

important, everyone learned how they could make a difference in a big organization. They need not tolerate wasteful practices, fearful of reprimand for proposing changes. Making such changes becomes part of their work responsibility.

The objective is to simplify things, making a real difference, not making a show of it by bringing in new raft of acronyms. Police work is already loaded with those.

Russell and Chandler found that a few basic tools work wonders. Armed with those, an army of police can arrest waste in details of work that supervisors have no time to tend to. If anyone's project requires statistics, for instance, Russell can assist them, but few improvements require fancy analysis. Most of it is disciplined application of common sense, in contrast to the old way of making improvements by assigning them to a few experts. They could never get around to many projects. Suggestions from rank-and-file often got lost in the shuffle.

One of Russell's illustrations of the discipline of standard work is officers visiting a burglary location. If they follow a well-done form rather than just taking notes, officers should not waste their time or the victim's time, but yet cover all questions that otherwise they might forget to ask. When they finish, the report is virtually done, ready to input into the system. Few follow ups are needed. With more complete, timely data, analysis to solve an aggravating string of petty burglaries is more likely to succeed.

Hitting the Street with It

Savings early in Continuous Improvement are impressive because without attention to it, waste accumulates over a long time. The initial projects in the Office of the Sheriff are no exception. Internally they have already made a big difference. In due course the Jacksonville community should notice better quality law enforcement and more of it for the same tax dollar. In the long run, the premise is that detailed improvements by many, many people add

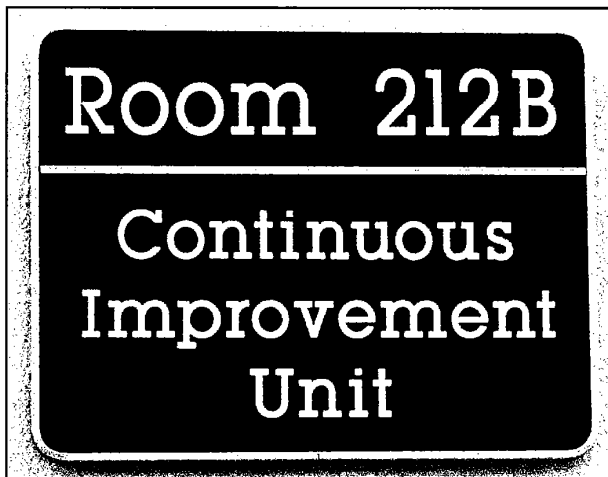


Figure 1. An Unusual Office Sign in a Police Station

up to significant change, like keeping a house clean every day instead of doing it once a year. But getting Continuous Improvement going is like starting a freight train. It takes a while to build momentum, but once rolling it tends to keep going. So far 1532 people of the 3000 employees have taken the introductory four-hour course, and follow-on courses are offered. Now the organization is learning how to use the training. Eventually Continuous Improvement will become a daily habit, not a novel program.

In the first few months of training, Randy and Renea were involved in every change. That was too slow a start. The line departments had to take responsibility for improvement projects with Randy and Renea coaching and "blowing the bugle."

Changes that don't affect law enforcement policy, like organizing an area by 5S, are done immediately; no permission is required. Those happen daily. However, more formal suggestions may take more people or money to carry out, and about a third involve department "policy," either because they affect multiple units, or because rules for police work may once have been established for a reason unknown to the person submitting a suggestion. For example, most arrests are a routine procedure, but in a few cases anything can happen, and by surprise.

Suggestions that may take a policy change are considered at a weekly meeting by the Directive Review Committee, composed of senior officers. Those involving software are also reviewed by the Technology Advisory Group (IT). To keep suggestions from "falling into a black hole," they are immediately assigned to a senior officer for follow up, implementing the proposal if it has merit, and giving feedback to the employee if it doesn't. Each suggestion is given a project number and posted on an internal web page. All employees can check the status of any suggestion at any time. And every one has a 35-day fuse lit. By that time a decision must be communicated to the proposing employee, even if it is a complicated proposal. If the suggestion is accepted, a work plan to implement it is prepared, with an officer assigned responsibility

to carry it out. Progress on implementation is tracked on the same web page.

Although Randy and Renea have bigger expectations of Continuous Improvement in the future, progress so far has been impressive. People are more confident making changes too. In six months, they had 95 formal suggestions; over half have been implemented. Before Continuous Improvement, only one or two hardy souls per year dared suggest an improvement. Of course, they expect the volume of suggestions to increase in the future, but Continuous Improvement is starting to work although it is still new to many employees.

If they had anything to do over, Randy and Renea would push improvement responsibility out to departments much sooner, and train the senior command in Continuous Improvement more thoroughly; too much sputtering getting started. Had that transfer come sooner, progress would have gone faster.

Notable Improvements

One of the first Continuous Improvement projects evaluated the hiring of school crossing guards. It took too long, and they hired too few of the applicants. The Post-It Notes still on the wall for display (see Figure 2) illustrate how simply they approach improvement. The employees doing the work mapped out the process with Post-It Notes. They decided that a few steps were pure waste, to be eliminated. Of those steps necessary, they compared the best performance they could recall with the worst they could remember, noting what made the difference. This provided plenty of ideas to try a new method.

The next hiring cycle, for the 2006-2007 school year, the time required dropped from 68 days to three, with the actual work time per applicant being fifty minutes, including interview time. In addition, they hired almost all qualified applicants interviewed, versus 61 percent by the old method.

The high-volume copy center came under scrutiny. It had been making 89,000 imprints a week. After many "why" questions, the team concluded that a third of

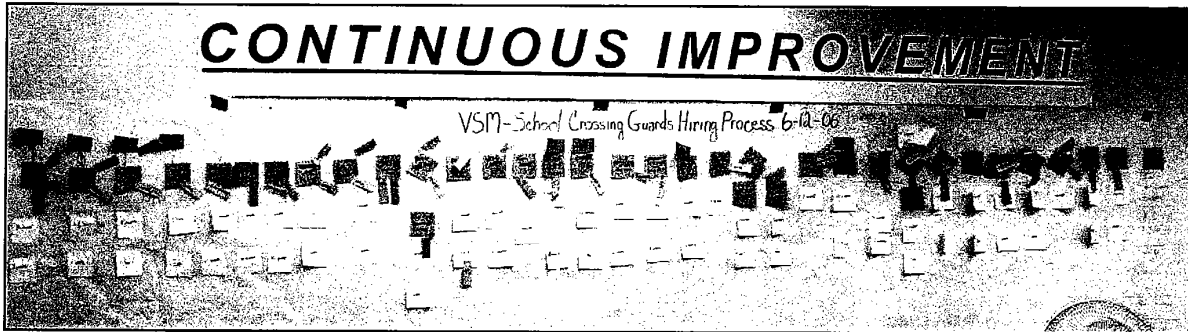


Figure 2. The Post-It Notes on the wall are the value stream for hiring school crossing guards. They are hard to see, but the top row is steps in the process. The second row down is a reminder of best performance for each step. The third row down is ticklers to recall the worst performance. The team reworked the wall into a much improved process. That simple; no software eye candy to display.

these copies were never used — pure waste. They reduced the workload and improved the flow of the process. The reduction in annual labor making copies freed up 25 people to do work more vital to public service somewhere in the Office of the Sheriff.

Picking up the mail was another old custom that died. For decades, all departments, including outlying stations, traveled to the central mail room daily to collect departmental mail. That's a lot of time by a host of people picking up mail. It was a social occasion too, visiting while waiting in long lines. This was replaced by a system like those used in most large organizations. Mail couriers deliver to all departments on a regular daily schedule, sometimes multiple times daily. No one knows how much time the old way wasted, but it was a big sinkhole.

Sergeant Billy Tarkington in the supply area was one of the first employees to take the Continuous Improvement course. It prompted him to spearhead a change to relieve a pain to everyone in the department for as long as they could remember. By regulation, everyone had to come personally to the supply room and sign for everything received. A clerk had to pick the order and prep the sheet to be signed. The long lines were like waiting for a choice ride at Disney World, but without the enjoyment at the end.

Now all common police expendables —

pens, evidence bags, etc. that “no one is ever going to come looking for” — are stocked on shelves that everyone walks by picking off what they need; no signing. The supply room simply restocks the shelves as items disappear. No increase in the amount of expendables used has been detected.

And the long lines waiting to be fitted with a uniform disappeared. (Police often mess up a uniform in the line of duty.) Now uniforms are arrayed by size on racks. Officers shop and try on sizes, almost as if in a clothing store, then sign out those they selected.

Everybody later wondered why this wasn't done a long time ago. Again, no one can estimate how much collective time personnel wasted doing it the old way. Now that Sergeant Tarkington and the supply room crew have grabbed the “low hanging fruit,” they are thinking up ways to improve the new system. And don't worry, they are making sure that people aren't overusing supplies; that's waste too.

A walk around the Sheriff's department revealed numerous areas where former messes have been organized into a visible management system. One of those is the print shop where officers pick up forms. While the Sheriff's Department doesn't have nearly as many forms as the Internal Revenue Service, it's a wall full. Now officers go by and pick forms off a rack restocked by a “kanban system.” An empty

rack is the signal to fill it up. Only when it is running low is another batch of forms printed. Saves time, fewer forms are thrown away unused, and the total inventory of paper is lower.

The department reorganized its media room by visible controls too. Now even reporters checking for stories waste less time finding what they want.

Continuous improvement has also arrived in the communications center, where 911 calls are received, and officers are dispatched to a scene. Everyone is cross-trained; the department needs depth covering every position to be sure that all desks are covered no matter what is going on. The dispatch room operates in cells so that controllers working adjoining areas can easily see each other and communicate. If one is overloaded, calls can transfer to a partner.

That mode of operation is not new. Dispatch demands close concentration on the work, and careful analysis of its organization, but dispatchers now have a keener sense of waste. One small example was realizing that pawnshop codes (to track possible stolen items) for Jacksonville need not all be recoded for the national pawnshop database. All items do not go into that database. Time was being wasted on a useless activity.

Avoiding a New Jail

By far the most financially dramatic result of Continuous Improvement training was avoiding the building of a new jail. In early 2006, Jacksonville had the same problem as many cities, too many people in jail, about 500 more people than it had standard cell bunks. This was a festering operational problem, but not yet critical enough for a judge to mandate release of prisoners.

Sheriff Rutherford asked senior commanders to prepare a plan to fix this. They first did the normal thing, proposing a new jail building estimated to cost \$32 million when fully equipped. Jacksonville didn't have that level of spare cash. A vote on a new bonding authority would be necessary to fund it.

Rutherford asked the commanders to put their Continuous Improvement tools to work, ask lots of why questions, and peel down the problem to root causes. They rooted around with this for a while and came back with a novel plan. The present jail had plenty of capacity except for bunk space. The cells were big enough to hold a third bed in each one without cramping living space, so convert the cells to three-person occupancy instead of two. Furthermore, the department ran an occupational training program in which selected prisoners learned steel fabrication and welding. If the trainers and prisoners did the work, the total conversion would cost only \$84,000.

Cell modification began in late September 2006; it finished in April 2007. The project added 984 beds of capacity for \$84,000 versus 636 beds in a new jail for \$32 million. Costs to operate the modified jail also rise very little as the cell population goes up. The real objective is to keep the crime rate down so the department never needs a bigger jail.

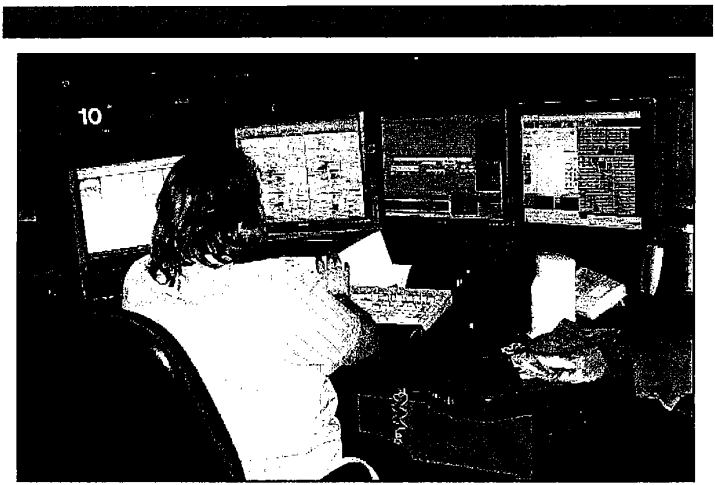


Figure 3. A 911 operator at work. It's not an easy job, and it requires a four-year college degree. Equipment is designed to adjust in position for ergonomic reasons. Breaks can't be precisely scheduled, so when the action is heavy, grab a bite to eat when you can, if you can.

A Different Way of Life

The hang up that every Continuous Improvement organization has to work through is to make improvement changes stick, so further improvements can top the first ones. Lt. Russell and Sheriff Rutherford have noted that in a few areas, after a few months a change was starting to slip. That's normal; people tend to go back to working by old habits. To avoid this and keep improving, leaders at all levels have to learn how to function in a different organizational culture. This transition in a law enforcement agency seems little different from that which most "lean" commercial companies must go through. The Office of the Sheriff is starting to make that shift, so that Continuous Improvement becomes part of a different way of work life. It takes time.

When Continuous Improvement becomes a new way of life, one of the big differences is that more attention focuses on work processes, or "the system," rather than personal performance within the existing system. Someone doing something extraordinary to take care of an emergency using the present process may be praised, and that's the end of it. With Continuous Improvement, the first thought is that something must be wrong with a work process, or we would not have had an emergency. Was

it poor training; poor maintenance; poor communication procedures? "Why" questions begin. Extraordinary performance overcoming errors that should not have occurred is a sign of waste.

Successful Continuous Improvement changes most work cultures dramatically. Most organizations are accustomed to operating according to system rules and the preferences of current bosses, and by top-down hierarchy. Status systems inevitably form around that. With Continuous Improvement, more rules are determined by the logic of the work process; fewer are directives from "the boss." People must think more for themselves, seeing why they do what they do, not just blindly following a procedure. And yet Continuous Improvement depends on holding a new method as standard until something better is devised. A process discipline displaces much command-and-control discipline.

However, police officers must use their heads on duty, not just blindly follow their process rules. So must all non-uniformed employees. Lean organizations need core values imbued in all employees. If you have to do something different, make a critical exception to a standard process and act, how should you behave?

The core values of the Office of the Sheriff are in Figure 4. They are not just

Core Values of the Office of the Sheriff

Respect for Others
Worthy of Trust
Community Focus
Always Improving

From Sheriff John Rutherford: These can't be regarded as wallpaper. They are cryptic, so one must think about them and reflect until they become ingrained in what you are and how you behave on the job.

Figure 4.

words on the wall. Devise the best processes you can, and follow the values, and police work will improve.

Continuous Improvement is first viewed as a set of techniques to make work processes more efficient by reducing delays, conserving space, and so on. But if everyone is involved in making their work better, these become symbiotic with a different way of work life. That change is as dramatic as the early waste-busting projects.

This affects the heart of the organization. The Office of the Sheriff is planning how to reflect this shift in leadership training and in the criteria used for evaluating job performance. The supervisors mean well, but it's no small change to become accustomed to regular process improvement, giving people their heads, proposing improvement and following up. The changes, already dramatic, have just begun. The objective is to have fewer and fewer fat waste targets to hit because peo-

ple stop waste before it accumulates into a big target.

And what would Sheriff Rutherford consider to be a big milestone of achievement on this journey? Becoming the first non-production service organization to win a Shingo Prize, now given to lean, world-class industrial plants in North America.

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