



April 2014

From the Director's Desk: Spring Brings New Faces, New Trainings, and More...

It's hard to believe that almost a year has already passed since I first took over as the Director of Continuous Improvement (CI) for the State of Minnesota. April was one of the busiest months we've ever had for training, project facilitation and other work around the State, and it went by in a flash. June 5 will mark the beginning of my second year in this role, and I know it will be here in no time at all.

As I reflect on this first year so far, and particularly on the activity of the last couple months, I'm excited by the progress we've made – and the groundwork now laid for the future. In May and June, we will hold the inaugural sessions for our two new training courses, focused on CI project leadership and effective problem solving. Along with those, our on-demand training programs are already finding success with a number of agencies. And last month we introduced one of our first "Train the Trainer" modules, which will equip staff all around Minnesota to be expert CI trainers!

Most prominently though, in April we hired the latest new addition to our team. Wish a warm welcome to **Cathy Beil**, the new Improvement Data Coordinator for our office. Cathy (pictured at right) comes to us from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and she brings with her experience and expertise in records management, SharePoint development and much more. In this new role, Cathy will be focusing on our tracking and reporting of improvement projects on an enterprise level. Under her guidance, our office is set to take a significant step forward in the way it handles data and measurement.



With that very thing in mind, I wanted to take this opportunity to encourage all of our readers and partners to report recent improvement projects and events to us. In fiscal year 2013, state agencies reported more than **250** improvement projects to our office. With fiscal 2014 already over three-fourths over, we have only received report of about **15** projects so far. As we attempt to measure the impact CI is having on Minnesota government, we want to include your successes. And we are eager to share your achievements with the Governor's Office, senior leaders at the agencies, legislators, and other stakeholders around the State.

If you have projects or events you'd like to report to us, don't hesitate to contact [Cathy](#) or [myself](#) to start the conversation on what you've been working on lately!

Mary Jo Caldwell

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DHS Team Uses Kaizen to Improve Scheduling and Time-Off Processes

Conventional wisdom goes that every continuous improvement (CI) project starts with identifying a problem, issue or opportunity. Then begin the efforts to address the problems and work toward a new and improved reality.

So the story began in similar fashion this April at the Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center, operated by the Department of Human Services (DHS). The issue identified there: Getting staff to use more vacation time (while ensuring patient and staff safety of course).

Don't check your monitor; you read that right. On the surface, managers in some organizations might not give something like this much attention. But in the case of this DHS team, the issue hinted at a number of current realities in their scheduling and time-off request processes that presented a worthy opportunity for a CI project.



The DHS Kaizen team at the Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center.

Going into this Kaizen event, some staff at the Anoka center were in jeopardy of losing vacation time, because staffing requirements limited when and how many staff could be granted vacation leave. In most instances, vacation leave had to be requested six months in advance. Additionally, union contracts prioritize vacation leave based on tenure, which often resulted in very few newer employees being able to take vacation leave during the summer months. These factors often limited the length of vacation leave regardless of a person's accrued vacation time.

But convening a Kaizen event to improve scheduling and time-off requests in this facility wasn't just about increasing staff usage of vacation time. That was one of the primary goals, but the event had a number of goals aimed at improving the staffing conditions at the Anoka center. The team was committed to creating stronger staffing levels and a better environment for both employees and patients. The expectation: An improved approach to scheduling and time-off requests would make employees healthier, happier and less stressed, while also improving the quality and responsiveness of care that patients at the center received. Other benefits, such as decreased overtime, reductions in workplace injuries and improved retention of quality employees, were also anticipated in turn.

Upcoming Events

May 6, Lean 101, Full ([Waitlist](#))

May 7, Leading CI Projects, Full ([Waitlist](#))

June 12, Lean 101, [Register](#)
4 seats remaining

June 12, Effective Problem Solving, Full, ([Waitlist](#))

June 16-17, Kaizen Facilitator Training, Full ([Waitlist](#))

Aug. 5, Lean 101

Aug. 6-7, Kaizen Facilitator Training

Sept. 8, Lean 101

Sept. 8, Effective Problem Solving

Sept. 11, Leading CI Projects
Oct. 6, Lean 101

Oct. 7-8, Kaizen Facilitator Training

Nov. 3, Lean 101

Nov. 3, Effective Problem Solving

Nov. 4, Leading CI Projects

Dec. 2, Lean 101

Dec. 3-4, Kaizen Facilitator Training

View all Lean events at
www.lean.state.mn.us/calendar

Register for trainings at
mnlean.eventbrite.com.

Registration for more upcoming trainings will open soon.

The Kaizen method worked as it so often does by identifying and addressing **process**-related challenges. In mapping out their process the team saw the steps that add value and where wastes were present in the process. Seeing the waste is the first step in identifying opportunities for improvement. After mapping out a new process and developing implementation recommendations, the team is anticipating marked improvement, striving for a reality where most vacation requests are responded to in real-time, or close to it.

But the success of this event goes beyond the process wins. One of the other merits of the Kaizen method was on full display here: Active engagement from a diverse team of employees who know and live the process.

The needs and requirements of all involved stakeholders were examined and the various perspectives in the process were well voiced and always respected. Topics like time-off and scheduling can be touchy, but the team effectively managed the contending expectations of senior staff, new employees, the Unions, and patients too. All told, a positive, supportive environment was fostered and maintained throughout the event. That constructive attitude and professionalism is sure to serve the team well in working toward the achievement of their goals in the everyday working environment.
