



## KAIZEN

*guiding the people  
creativity to fuel  
business improvements*

A CROW, half-dead with thirst, came upon a Pitcher which had once been full of water; but when the Crow put its beak into the mouth of the Pitcher he found that only very little water was left in it, and that he could not reach far enough down to get at it. He tried, and he tried, but at last had to give up in despair. Then a thought came to him, and he took a pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped it into the Pitcher. At last, at last, he saw the water mount up near him, and after casting in a few more pebbles he was able to quench his thirst and save his life.

**continuously**

“LITTLE BY LITTLE <sup>^</sup> DOES  
THE TRICK.”

The way I have seen Kaizen happening in our midst is a travesty of the philosophy of Kaizen.

Most of the times, the Kaizen movement is started in the right earnest. Soon, we get to our favourite past time of chasing numbers (they may be Kaizen numbers).

Getting back to the roots, Kaizen was supposed to be an opportunity for a person to improve his work area, work method and work output by lessening the pain he/ she feels while working.

It is this pain that we become habitual to and it is this pain that needs to be awakened through Kaizen.

It all started with suggestion schemes. Nice looking boxes, craftily worded invitations were farmed with much fanfare. But these did not convince the target audience of the genuine intentions of the management.

The remaining chance was lost as the suggestions at times were evaluated solely by management (sometime also with union representatives). None had any direct stakes in workmen performance, thereby cutting the cord between Kaizen & operational performance.

I was not surprised, when in one industry the suggestion box remained empty for the whole of two months before it was taken off.

What a way to communicate? The workmen were confused between the constant threat to their jobs (no commitment from the industry in form of formal appointments) and the request for suggestions. They did the obvious. Any other response would have been a surprise.

*I would love the day when the ballot boxes will be turned back empty because of non-genuine candidates.*

Quality circle movement was a fine example of improvement through operating personnel but alas it got bundled into a management controlled program leaving little to cheer by the participants.

The participants just reacted to the guidelines (dictate) set by management.

This effectively switched off the creativity.

Did you have a chance to look at what is passed on as Kaizen?

I use in our trainings some examples out of the CII repository of Kaizen. I should be thankful that we have some examples to guide & enthuse others. However, if this what we have as best examples for others, we will need to have a very critical look at our Kaizen movement.

The modern industry is based on standardisation and repeatability. This is effective in reproduction of goods. Unfortunately, the requirements today are changing the marketplace back to the artisan area, where each piece was crafted to customer requirements. The modern industry was just the opposite. The new market place that has already come into being, demands the cost and speed of modern industry and the flexibility and personalised service of the artisan era.

Clearly, the current mindsets can not visualise a solution as these can not visualise the problem.

Kaizen is one tool that symbolises bottom up approach to improvement. The freedom of creative thinking of an individual is finely blended with the knowledge of self's workplace and safety of mistake proofing through active participation of management. Most importantly, it is a proactive tool that gives the power and initiative to improve to an individual.

# Kaizen

Helps an individual to feel free

Allows him/ her to take the initiatives

Focuses on reducing the pain that he/ she feels in daily working

Helps a person to feel valued as a craftsman (specialist)

Is based on team work with other departments of industry thereby creating self imposed guidelines

Is a self-run structured movement thereby ensuring long term sustainability?

For the craftsman approach demanded by new marketplace, the workman has to be accorded the respect of a craftsman.

What better way than Kaizen?

For Kaizen movement to be successful, it has to be a part of a structured & detailed operational improvement strategy like Total Quality Management or, Lean Management. This way the Kaizen efforts are guided to what they are supposed to do – business improvements.

Habit of improvement thus formed is contagious and eventually percolates to the society through family.

*Statements in this article are not generalised & are based on instances in different organisations at different times.*