



SECTION

1

Visual Workplace Basics

Many people believe they know what a visual workplace is—but it is so much more than is commonly understood. In a thriving visual workplace, one of the greatest benefits is work that makes sense.

In this first book section, we enlist the support of company management and recognize the expertise you already bring to your work. Then you get an overview of visuality, including basic definitions and principles and the *Ten Doorways*. We show you how visual devices translate vital information into exact behavior—your own or other people's.

Then you learn about eight elements—or building blocks—on which a visual workplace is built. The first is *I-driven*, an approach emphasized throughout this book that affirms that what *you* do, think, say, feel, and create matters—a lot. We return again and again to these eight elements as the visual learning and application continue.

Next, you learn the basics of getting ready to launch a visual conversion—and your supervisors and managers start to learn about Leadership Tasks they must undertake to ensure your efforts are well-supported as you create dazzling visual inventions in your area.

As part of this, you and they learn about five hands-on tools for achieving the first set of visual goals: a visual showcase, measurable bottom-line results, and an on-going attitude of learning.

Chapter One

Introduction to The Visual Workplace

A Word at the Start to Managers

A Word at the Start to Value-Add Associates

You are the Expert

What is a Visual Workplace?

The Translation of Information Into Behavior

The Pre-Visual Workplace

The Ten Doorways: A Workforce of Visual Thinkers

The Benefits of a Visual Workplace

A Word at the Start to Managers

This is a book for operators—those employees responsible for converting materials into shipped products or transforming protocols into delivered services. That is their job.

How many times in the last decade have you heard company executives—even yourself—proclaim that *people* are your organization's most valuable resource? That employees on the value-add level are the experts of their work, and that they must be allowed—empowered—to organize their own work and work area to better suit their needs and the needs of high performance? This, you were told, is the doorway to a spirited, engaged, and aligned workforce—and to the empowerment indispensable to enterprise excellence.

But what does this really mean? How does a company create an empowered workforce while strengthening the bottom line?

This book addresses that, telling you both the what and the how—what true empowerment is and how the organization achieves it. But we discuss these over-arching concepts with two important differences: we discuss them as part of a visual workplace and directly with your value-add workforce—the people you say you want to empower or empower more. Whether you refer to these hardworking, inventive individuals as associates, technicians, operators, hands-on employees, touch labor or workers, they are—as Rolls-Royce puts it—the *experts*.

Every great change requires three things: inspiration (a vision of the horizon), a vehicle (the means for

getting there), and a pathway (the map to the destination). These three elements are described in this book in the context of workplace visuality. In 25 years of research and implementation, I have never discovered a more dynamic, creative, and complete approach for operator-led visual conversions than the *Work That Makes Sense* methodology.

And what does that conversion look like? Work areas aglow with tangible intelligence and coherency, speaking through visuality with precision, relevance, and completeness—thanks to the visual language value-add associates have learned to diligently and inventively imbed there.

That is the subject of this book, and it is addressed to your value-add employees. These excellent contributors will find an ample fund of visual workplace concepts, principles, tools, methods, encouragement, teaching, and examples in these pages. And they will be successful *only if*...

Managers, executives, and supervisors, this *only if* is yours.

- *Only if* you become an active part of that transformation will it happen.
- *Only if* you demonstrate your commitment by actively supporting and encouraging people in these tasks will it be realized.
- *Only if* you provide value-add employees with the visual workplace training and supplies they need—along with a quiet place where they can think and experiment—will these same associates decide to convert their areas to the high level of operational functionality the visual approach is designed to achieve.
- *Only if* you designate separate time for visual improvement can it realistically happen in the face of pressing production demands.
- *Only then* can you look forward to a workplace that speaks with the precision, relevancy, timeliness, and tangible completeness that the language of visuality provides.

These *only ifs* are the reason you are the first person I address as this book begins. You are essential to the return on the investment you made when you purchased this book. That investment is one of both money and hope. Throughout this book you will find notes to guide your thinking and actions in support of those outcomes—principles and practices of leadership, commitment, and engagement. You are encouraged to read, practice, and apply them.

Which brings me to the final *only if*.

Only if you read this book cover to cover (not just scan it) and *only if* you deeply absorb it, will you learn to become the ally of the change you say you want. Whether you are an executive, supervisor, manager or CEO, *your involvement is indispensable to the success of this transformation*. And there will be no success for you to support without the release and empowering of the human will that is resident in the people who work closest to where value gets added in your enterprise. They are the *power* in *empowerment*. Only with the transformation of their role from doers to thinkers to implementers will you gain the prosperity, stability, and market scope you long for and expect. And that can only happen with your active and knowing participation.

A Word at the Start to Value-Add Associates

The *Work That Makes Sense* process described in this book is specifically designed to help you gain control over your work and the outcomes that work is meant to produce—as I like to say it, control over your corner of the world.

Since your managers and supervisors need to be partners in this process, there are notes to them throughout the book. But you are the reason this book was written. You are the hero of its pages.

In them, you are invited to consider a new way of seeing—and a new way of solving. I call that new way: *Visual Thinking*. The destination is called a visual workplace.

In a visual work environment, you and your colleagues will find what you need when you need it, know correct quantities and mixes at a glance, meet every deadline on-time, and perform complex tasks with precision and confidence—because you have designed it that way.

At its core, workplace visibility is a language: the language of excellence imbedded into the physical landscape of work. As a language, it will gain popularity, common usage, and power as more and more people in your company begin to “speak” it. I hope it will become your language as well.

Fellow traveler on this wondrous journey, let’s get started.

You are the Expert

You are an expert at what you do. You know your job. Whether that job is in a bank, lumber mill, medical facility, military depot, food, chemical or pharmaceutical processing plant, restaurant, oil field, engineering or marketing office, retail outlet, or automobile factory—you are good at what you do, whatever you do and wherever you do it.

Yet that doesn’t mean that everything at your work always happens as expected or according to plan. Not everything is always perfect—not in your company or, for that matter, any company; not in your work area or any work area.

On most days, though, knowing your job means that you know what is supposed to happen. And it does. But there are other days when it just doesn’t. In fact, sometimes what is *not supposed to happen* happens for so many days in a row that work seems more like drudgery than a job you know well—a struggle instead of a flow. On days like that, work can begin to seem like some kind of insanity. It just doesn’t make sense.

Oh sure, there are reasons for that—and you know them. If someone were to ask you, you could list plenty of them. In fact, on some level, all the reasons that things go wrong are right. That’s not gibberish. It’s just a way of saying: You are right about knowing what causes most problems in your area. To which you might say, half-jokingly...*at least I am right about something!*

The fact is you are not only an expert at the work you were hired to do. You’ve also become an expert at spotting the problems that keep you from that work.

The real question is: what to do about those problems? Will you become skilled as well at solving those problems, an expert at eliminating them—not just during your shift but permanently?

This is a book about finding those answers and building them into the very process of your work. In

that way, the work itself tells you when you are right, when you are wrong or on your way into—or out of—either. The workplace learns to speak. You turn it into a visual workplace—and you are about to learn how.

- How to transform an information-starved work area, step-by-step, into one that is information-rich.
- How to take the struggle out of your work day and put the sense back in through visual information sharing.
- How a robust set of principles, concepts, terms, and methods can help you identify problems at your work that are caused by missing information; and then
- How to minimize or eliminate problems completely through solutions that are visual.
- How to use a set of hands-on implementation tools so you and others can carry through on your ideas and inventions and actually put them into place in your work area.
- How to use the power of the mind, our own natural strength, to help identify the need for visibility and fulfill it.
- How to create work that makes sense by designing a workplace that talks to you in a precise, accurate, complete, and practical language, a language you understand because it is your own language, your own visual language—and that language will make sense.

In short, you will become a *Visual Thinker*.

What is a Visual Workplace?

We'll start by defining a visual workplace:

A visual workplace is self-ordering, self-explaining, self-regulating, and self-improving; where what is supposed to happen does happen, on time, every time, day or night—because of visual devices.

If you remove the last four words—*because of visual devices*—you remove the engine that drives that definition and its outcome as well. Without visual devices, the outcome of *on time, every time, day or night* becomes impossible. Why? Because it is visual devices in the workplace that ensure that what is *supposed* to happen *does* happen. That is their primary purpose.

Here's the definition of a visual device:

A visual device is a mechanism or thing intentionally designed to influence, guide, direct, limit or even guarantee our behavior by making vital information available as close to the point-of-use as possible to anyone and everyone who needs it without speaking a word.



Photo 1.1 In the early days, gas was pumped out of the ground into a clear glass cylinder that showed what you were getting, including if the gas was dirty (a big problem at that time). From there, it flowed by gravity down the hose into the car. Only the calibration marks on the cylinder express true visual information sharing—for viewing and measuring the gas as it flows out.



Photo 1.2 The modern gas pump is so highly visual that, with a little help from you, it easily substitutes for the gas attendant and the cashier.

Look at the workplace known as our local gas station and the evolution of the gas pump in Photos 1.1 and 1.2. Early on, visual information sharing was almost absent. Then as the technology became more complex and the number of people needing gas soared, the need for visual devices also increased. The modern day gas station is flooded with visual devices that make it possible for even the most untrained driver to complete the transaction of *gas-for-money* safely, precisely, and with no supervision. Just try to get the kind of gas you need in the right quantity without the help of visual devices and mini-systems. Impossible!

Consider the car itself (Photo 1.3). Examine it closely—inside the car where the driver sits, under the hood, under the chassis, in the trunk—and you will find no less than 144 visual devices that help you drive the car, maintain it, and, when it breaks down, repair it or pay someone to do it for you. Over 110 million cars and trucks use U.S. roads and highways every day and all of them are *Visual Machines*®.



Photo 1.3 The car is a visual machine.

Visual devices make our roads and highways safe and highly functional for us, our family, and friends. For bus, taxi, ambulance, and truck drivers everywhere, these devices form a vital part of their workday. Visuality on our roads and highways serves as a gigantic adherence mechanism, providing a common language of at-a-glance rules that makes our economy—and the prosperity that follows—possible.

Look at the Photo Cluster 1.4 of vehicle and roadway visual devices below and appreciate the sanity and safety they bring to our everyday life. As you do, realize that these devices did not fall out of the sky. They didn't happen by accident. They happened by design, intentionally.



Photo Cluster 1.4

As a visual thinker-in-the-making, do the following as you consider these devices: remove them in your mind's eye from all the vehicles and roadways on the planet. Now imagine the impact of that for our world. Imagine the problems, delays, accidents, insurance claims, heartache, and expense in an everyday world without visual devices.

In the language of visuality, there is a single word for these headaches: *motion*. *Motion* is corporate enemy number #1 and is defined as *moving without working*. You may be familiar with the term *waste*—well, motion is like that, only much more specific, as you will soon discover.