



## Foreword BY PETER DOBBS

How did you get to work today?

Hundreds of thousands of people travel to work each day, mostly without incident, using a transport system that copes with billions of transactions, supported by little external management. Yet while every single one of us has a unique agenda and set of requirements, as a rule we arrive at our destinations safely and on time, every time, day or night.

All modes of travel face the same challenge with much the same outcome. We find our way around the airport, from departures to passport control, through security and then to the right gate, without asking the way or getting lost. Without speaking a word, we can know, with precision, if our plane is on time, which gate to go to, and when. On the tarmac, planes land and take off in a continuous stream, mostly without incident, despite mind-boggling variables and hair-raising complexity.

The reasons for this are right in front of our eyes—visual information sharing.

Road travel stands witness to the power of visuality as well. Though we may use a map (standard instruction) when we drive, even without one, we receive a vital visual message on average every 3 seconds when travelling at legal speed—and this is excluding the basic white-line road markings. Imagine a road system devoid of all signs, signals, and road markings. Would the billions of transactions each day go as smoothly?

The same is true when we travel by train, bus, underground or any other public transport system. It is the same in the supermarket, gas station, and hospital. Visual devices are everywhere, guiding, informing, instructing, and making us comply. Their value is indisputable and accepted by us all.

Why is it, then, that as soon as we walk through the factory gate or the office door this all goes out the window? The very mechanism that gets us to our destinations, day in and day out, is often ridiculed and treated as “just a few lines on the floor and posters around the shop or office.” How many lines and signs got you to where you are today?

I urge every Supervisor, Manager, Director, Vice President, Managing Director, and President to find the time to familiarize themselves with Gwendolyn Galsworth’s work and in particular this book, *Visual Workplace—Visual Thinking*. Gwendolyn took me to a new level of “lean thinking” with her unique methodology of not just providing a visual workplace but enabling employees to think differently, to *think visually*.

She gave to the true expert on the shop floor and in the office (the value-add employee) the direct ability to improve his or her own work environment and productivity without the constant support/interference of so-called “lean/process improvement consultants”—outsiders who parachute in, tell those intimately involved in the work how to “do it better”, and then disappear, never to be seen again.

This tool of visual thinking clearly belongs with the individual employee, applied by the individual, to the direct benefit of the individual.

I know of no other improvement tool that has this quality or that guarantees such high levels of ownership, self-leadership, and therefore sustainment.

My personal background has had me involved in manufacturing and business process improvement since the early 1970s. I have seen the process grow from Group Technology, Cellular Manufacturing, Systems Engineering, Business Systems Redesign, Lean, and Six Sigma through too many operating systems emu-

lating the acclaimed Toyota Production System. This has been a fabulous journey of learning and application for me that still excites me after 30 years.

I have too many grey hairs and experience to claim that any one of these is better than another. Every improvement strategy is a compilation of tools, and it is the application of these tools at the right time and sequence—aligned with business needs and senior management commitment—that makes a success or failure of any improvement program.

To say, however, that the visual workplace/visual thinking is just another set of tools would be a gross understatement. For me, workplace visuality is not only an extremely powerful tool, it is a compulsory tool, one that must top the list of any business contemplating or going through change.

Why is this? Having taken many companies and factories through the journey to lean, introducing flow, single-point accountability, standardized work, teams, and takt time-based production, visual workplace/visual thinking is the one tool that not only ensures sustainment, it is also a cornerstone of all further improvement opportunities.

Workplace visuality is a powerful tool for enforcing information sharing at the point of use, standardized work, workplace standards, and improved productivity. It also enables employee flexibility, skill-building, and alignment. It drives consistency in operational and financial performance. As Gwendolyn says, “on time, every time, day or night”—using the same methodology that got you where you are sitting today!

Sit back, relax, and start what I believe will be a journey that will take your management abilities and understanding to another level.

Welcome to the Visual Thinking Club!

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