

Playing by the rules

If you're looking to achieve operational excellence, following these six golden rules will help smooth your path to success

IN TIMES OF uncertainty and austerity, all forms of expenditure can come under even more scrutiny than usual. Keeping these six golden rules at the front of your mind, however, will ensure that you give yourself and your business the best possible chance of success with the least amount of effort.

Rule 1 – make sure you articulate and demonstrate the need for change clearly. Provide clear reasons for the goal and present the case in unambiguous terms. This avoids confusion and precious time and effort being wasted. Establish a common understanding, too, of what needs to be achieved at the outset. This is pivotal to the success of any undertaking, especially if the goal is large-scale and complex in nature.

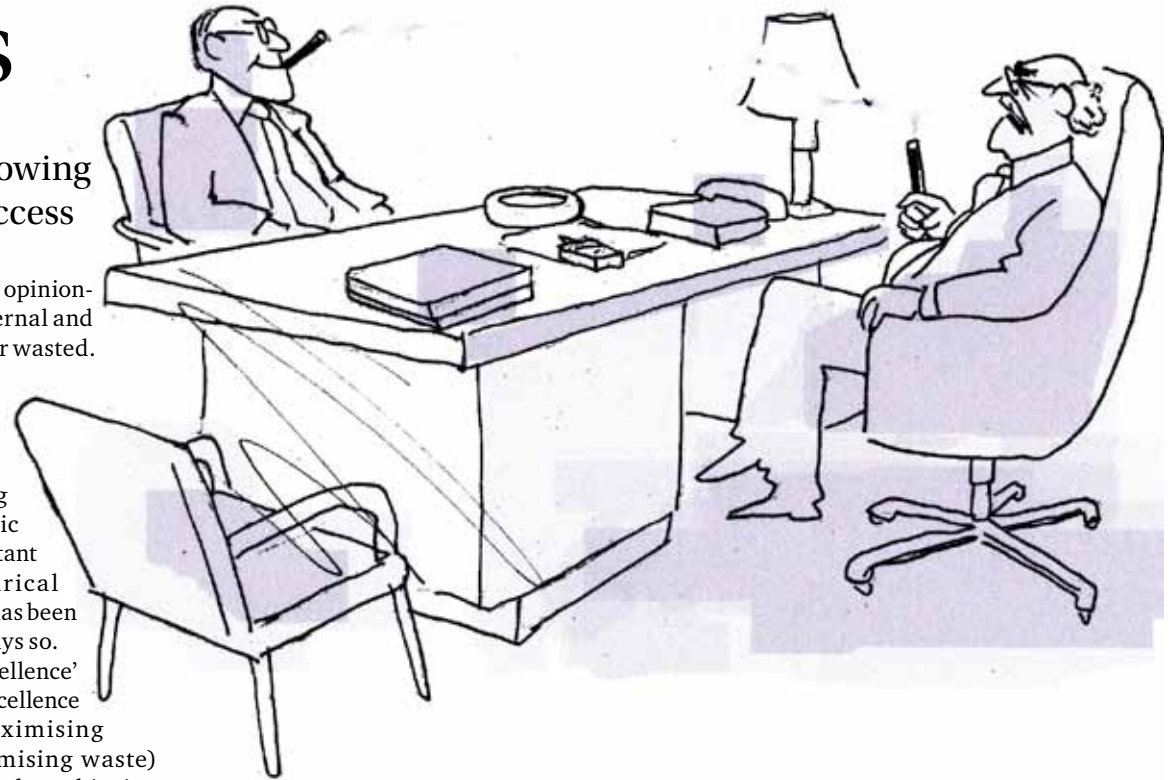
Rule 2 – ensure you gain senior-level sponsorship. If you wish to achieve anything of real substance, you have to get sponsorship at a senior level. Senior leaders of an organisation need to play an active and sustained role in the process. Without senior-level support, it is unlikely that you will get the resources you require for success. Instead, improvement activity is likely to be superseded by things that are deemed more important by management, and even if the goal is achieved, it is unlikely to get the recognition and ongoing support that it deserves.

Rule 3 – get key opinion formers onside.

Time spent identifying the key opinion-formers, who may be both internal and external stakeholders, is never wasted. They exist at all levels in any organisation so if you get them involved and win them over, your path to success will be greatly enhanced. Winning over the organisation's "public opinion" can prove more important than demonstrating empirical evidence. Effectively, success has been achieved because everyone says so.

Rule 4 – learn how to do 'excellence' properly. Learn how to apply excellence enablers such as lean (maximising customer value while minimising waste) effectively; it is an essential tool to achieving operational excellence. All levels of the organisation will need the appropriate training. Training should be combined with support in the application of lean on live projects, but bear in mind the next rule.

Rule 5 – become self-sufficient in the tools of excellence. For example, develop or recruit your own lean experts as they are a vital component in establishing the continuous improvement culture that should be the ambition of every business. Broaden the understanding of lean principles with staff at all levels, too. Adapt the role of any external expertise from the



"I've always played by the rules... fortunately, they were **my rules."**

initial doing to coaching and supporting your internal capability in the later stages, and consciously plan how knowledge transfer will occur between external experts and internal staff (don't assume this will happen naturally).

Rule 6 – use operational excellence as a staff engagement tool, not just for eliminating waste. Approaches such as lean help to increase the understanding of, and focus on, value

add throughout the organisation and can help harness the creativity and effort of the organisation. They can provide a mechanism for staff empowerment – especially for front-line staff – and ownership of performance.

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