

A 5S guide to those who don't do Lean manufacturing or not sure where to start.

TLDR at bottom

I have been doing a little 5S of my own, nothing too special. I was getting frustrated when I would be doing some home repairs or building something, building bike ramps for the kids is a favorite. I had a need to make life easier by sorting out the collection of screws I use into their relative sizes and the 'specials bin'. This is what 5S is about, it is not about tidying up for the sake of being tidy or looking good. It is about organizing tools, material, information or whatever so that it makes the work easier and more productive.

If you are doing 5S for any other reason than to make things better, then stop you are going to be fighting a losing battle and your efforts would be better spent elsewhere. Those of us who are in the situation where we have been told to do 5S or else, focus as much as you can on the making work better and less on the meeting corporate goals. If you can make the work easier, you'll get the "buy-in" you need and the corporate goals will get met. Focus on the corporate 5S measures and that is the goal you'll hit, not making the work better and getting the buy-in you want. There is a special name, Goodharts Law to describe this situation where the measure becomes the target. A nice description is at

<https://thehustle.co/Goodharts-Law> .



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For those unfamiliar with 5S, it is considered as one of the foundation tools of good Lean manufacturing practice. 5S stands for Sort, Set, Shine, Standardize and Sustain. It is used as a tool to improve the organization of the workplace and hence productivity. 5S is the Japanese version of Henry Fords practice of CANDO, Clean up, Arrange, Neatness, Discipline and Ongoing. Yes CANDO was translated in to Japanese, amended a bit and then translated back into English, ironically inefficient.

I approached my work from a Lean viewpoint, I wanted to get it right, I'll admit, the way I had previously organized things using the bags I bought the screws in from Rona was not working. So this is how I approached my this piece of 5S. Note I don't call it a 5S project even though it might seem like one for the simple reason, 5S doesn't have an end point. And that's the valuable but also hard part about 5S much of it is about keeping it going or 'Sustaining' the 5th S

Here we go:

First

Not batching up work - Only halfway through and that is fine. I do the next size as a jar or 2 becomes free. I've avoided doing everything at once, trying to keep the workflow going. If I'd tried to save up enough jars to do it all at once, yes, I'd have been quicker labelling them all and attaching the example screws to the top. The downside would have been having a dozen empty jars to store getting in the way. And it would have taken 9 months, 4 months in (I guess) I'm halfway through and I can find 50% of the screws almost immediately.

Sort – The first step of 5S is Sort. Here you say hey this is what we need, and this is what we don't need. We get rid of the junk that has been cluttering things up. One good trick is to red tag the things we are unsure of and put into a quarantined area. By quarantining what we have sorted out we give ourselves a chance to evaluate if we really need it or not. It also helps us with "letting go". Humans get oddly attached to things even if they are no longer any use to us if they once were.

My recommendation is to sort into everything in to 4 categories, family, friends, strangers and junk. Junk is just that, stuff to get rid of via the garbage or Kijiji. Family you want to keep close, the tools & material you use all the time. Friends we use sometime and strangers, well they get used rarely and you may want to reconsider even keeping them around.

Me – I threw out some junk that had I had collected and put some other things back where the belonged. Family was easy to identify those are the drywall and deck screws I use nearly all the time. Friends are the woodworking screws, not used as frequently but need to be kept at hand. The strangers are usually the hardest to deal with. I was loathed to throw out the odd sized screws I'd collected which I suspect I might need 'just in case". My

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solution is to keep a “specials” pot (you can see it far left), I’m allowed one specials pot ONLY and it can’t overflow!

Set - Waiting for the big empty jars of peanut butter to move onto the 2” & 2½” 😊.

Shine – I prefer to call shine, shiny. It points more at how do we keep things shiny, because that really is the challenge, how to keep things shiny as part of daily work.

Me - I deliberately use a wire cage to keep my screws in! It’s simple I can’t throw screws into the cage, they fall out. I’ve made it, so I have to put any unused screws back, preferably in the right jar. Next step will be to remove the cardboard at the bottom as more jars are used.

Standardization - Could do with some work, but I also remember good done is always better than perfect tomorrow.

Sustain – This one is on me. Now once the screws are done I’m looking forward to sorting out the nails, or maybe I need a hobby. Forgot this is to make a hobby easier.

Continuous Improvement – The aim of lean is to get to a point

I know the jars are plastic and will get scratched up making it difficult to tell how full a jar is. Something I’ll live with, until I find a better solution.

TL;DR (too long; didn’t read.)

5S is not about achieving perfection or making it look like fancy. It is about making things better, one step at a time. One step better is still one step better