

Gemba Walks

ACHIEVING ADOPTION AND UNLOCKING
HIGH-IMPACT OPERATIONAL BENEFITS



Introduction

In 2023, Hirsh Precision deployed a satellite team to work out of a new, yet incomplete, facility that would eventually become our new headquarters.

We initially opened this facility to support a project for one of our larger customers in the medical device sector - we needed more space and machines to support the high-volume production than what our current facility offered - but the satellite team and facility also provided us with the ideal conditions to successfully implement our Gemba Walk.

Gemba, the Japanese word for "actual place," is the physical location where value is added. Developed by the Toyota Production System (TPS), it prioritizes Continuous Improvement, waste reduction, and quality in the pursuit of operational excellence.

The Gemba Walk has become a standard practice for manufacturers, especially for larger companies and enterprises, and with it comes some standard, but strategic, benefits that you can expect to see from implementing the practice, including:

- Identifying waste on the production floor
- Making data-driven decisions
- Developing a culture of continuous improvement

Beyond that, and related to the bottom line, component manufacturers who implement Gemba Walks see positive impacts on productivity, costs, quality, and lead times.

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The Right Gemba Elements

The Gemba Walk is a critical practice for our team. It's a daily opportunity to connect management with production, and strategy with execution. Unfortunately, when it came to the Gemba Walk, our team experienced several false starts before achieving adoption across the organization.

In the past, we had tried versions of the Gemba Walk by having daily stand-up meetings or monitoring unique goals for individual cells. However, each implementation attempt saw a lack of participation and consistency, resulting in the activity fizzling out altogether. Our team successfully adopted the daily Gemba Walk due to three important factors:

- The right circumstances
- The right leadership
- The right elements

We mentioned the conditions that provided our organization with the required circumstances to launch a daily Gemba walk. The unique nature of the satellite team and facility being deployed to handle a high-volume project called for daily check-ins, accelerated issue escalation, quick turnaround problem-solving, and the structured feedback loop that the Gemba Walk provides.



The Right Gemba Elements

In addition to the right conditions, an organization also needs the right leadership to successfully implement a Gemba Walk. In Hirsh's case, our management team was empowered to lead this effort on a daily basis.

Beyond daily execution, though, our then-newly hired Chief Operations Officer had years of experience when it came to launching and maintaining organization-wide Gemba practices. His experience from working with large enterprises and corporations where Gemba-related activities are the norm was instrumental in our team's adoption.

In addition to conditions and leadership, the other factor we had to get right was the elements of our Gemba Walk. As we noted earlier, a key contributor to our false starts was either implementing the wrong elements or not all of the right ones. To achieve adoption, our Gemba Walk needed to be actionable, fast, structured, and relevant.



Actionable

After each Gemba Walk, both management and production team members leave with tangible action items that they can take immediate steps to complete.



Fast

Consistently, problems are solved faster and issues are escalated quicker than they were prior to implementing our Gemba Walks.



Structured

Each cell has the same resources to execute on, tracks the same metrics, and has the same expectations; removing the guesswork is key.



Relevant

Relevancy applies to both people and topics. Cells discuss only what's relevant, boosting participation. Each team has one representative at the Gemba Walk, ensuring no extra employees are pulled from their work.

Executing the Gemba Walk

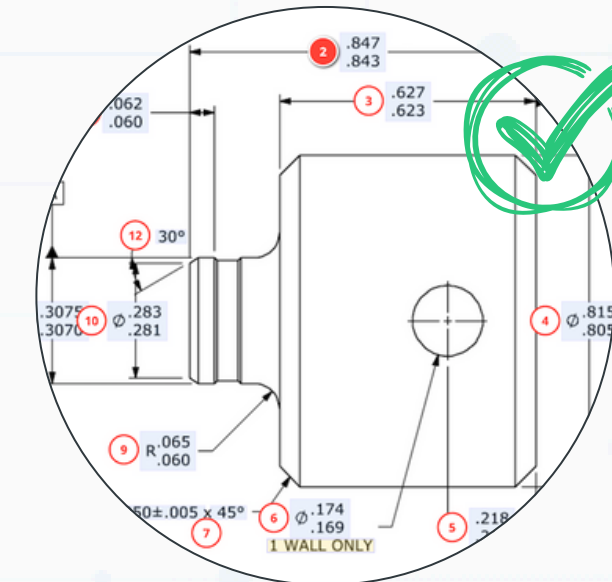
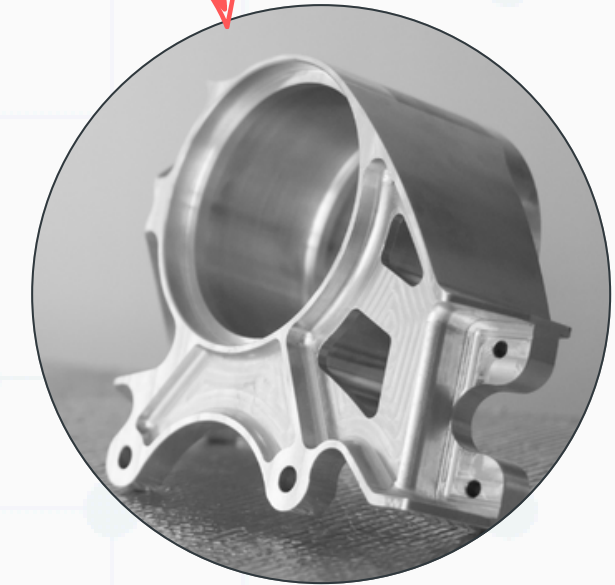
Our Gemba Walk is driven by people, topics, and resources.

For people, each cell represents a stop on the Gemba Walk, with the leads from each cell driving the conversation. Those cells include raw material, lathes, Fastems FMS, Fastems FPC, mills, finishing, general shop, and shipping.

Each stop on the Gemba Walk is visited by representatives from our manufacturing, production scheduling, engineering, quality, and Continuous Improvement teams.

This group reviews the safety, quality, delivery, and productivity metrics, as well as any pressing issues or problems that the cell escalates. These are the topics that drive the conversations for each Gemba Walk.

For resources, each cell maintains a whiteboard with its metrics, hot items, machine issues, key jobs that need to run, problems that need escalating, and an update for the following shift.



Key Benefits of Gemba Implementation

We touched on this briefly, but it's worth reviewing in more detail; component manufacturers who implement Gemba Walks experience a number of benefits. If you consistently execute your Gemba Walk and deliver on action items, you will see both short-term and long-term improvements across the production floor.

In addition to the obvious, built-in benefits that came with developing our own Gemba practices, we also observed some unexpected ones.



Metrics

An expected benefit from our daily Gemba Walks was around metrics. Unlike our previous attempts, we standardized the KPIs that each cell tracked to:

- Safety
- Quality
- Delivery
- Productivity

Not only are these metrics tracked at each cell, but they also roll up to a company-wide metrics board that's reviewed by the management team each day, at weekly leadership meetings, and by the entire organization at our weekly operations meetings.

Key Benefits of Gemba Implementation

Management Effectiveness

In addition to a daily review of the most pressing metrics, the Gemba Walk improved our management team's efficacy. Because we have representation from manufacturing, production scheduling, engineering, quality, and Continuous Improvement, nearly all issues that come up can be escalated and acted upon immediately.

Whether a cell needs material right away or a job is going to finish early, management can execute the required actions to keep cells, jobs, and machines running.

Leadership Development

An unforeseen benefit of implementing Gemba was leadership development at the cell level. The daily Gemba Walks provided cell leads with an opportunity to be more vocal and to escalate problems they were seeing faster.

As a result of the daily discussions, they feel empowered to bring issues to management's attention, who in turn can remove barriers to them being able to do their jobs.

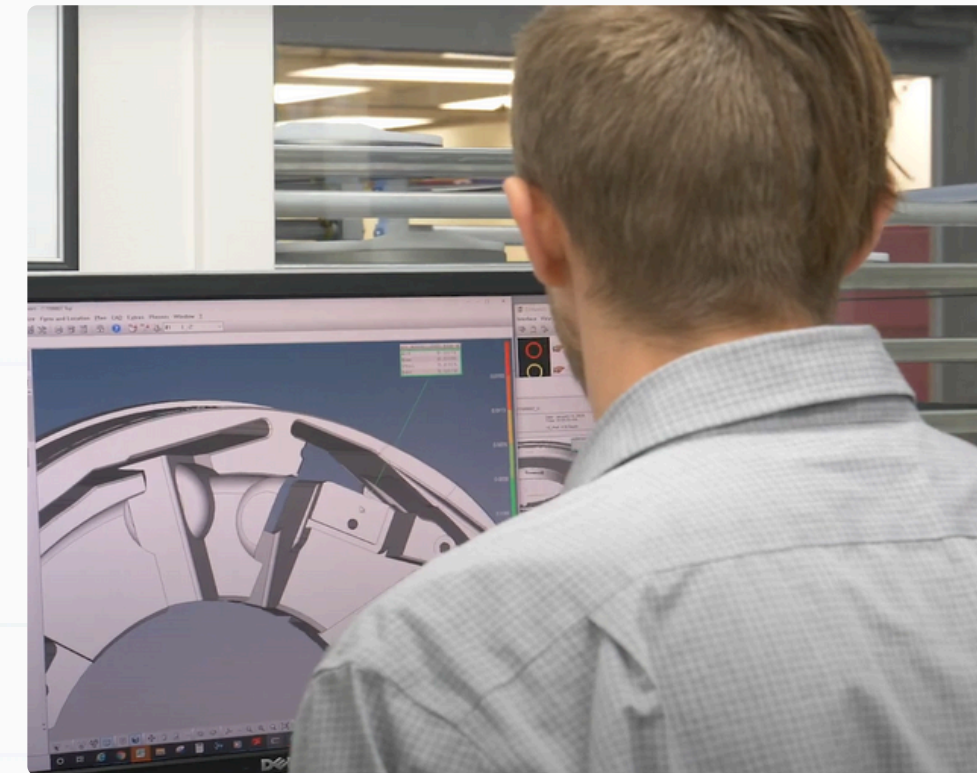


Key Benefits of Gemba Implementation

Customer Visibility

Another unforeseen benefit to the Gemba Walk was organization-wide visibility into customer needs. Before implementing Gemba, specific customer issues were known by the one or two employees who are a customer's main points of contact.

Whether it's unique customer requirements, a new project, or an expedite, if it's relevant to that cell it's going to be communicated through the Gemba. Over time, more of our employees are learning about our customers and their specific needs.



Ideation Opportunities

Although the Gemba Walk is one of the best avenues for problem-solving and issue escalation, it is also an opportunity for effective brainstorming. With representatives from those key teams, solutions are readily available.

But there are occasions when a cell lead knows there's a problem, but it isn't understood enough in that moment that they can articulate what solution is required. There's still research to be done around the problem before they can request specific help from management, but the Gemba Walk provides them with a very insightful sounding board that they can bounce ideas off of.

Because the problems we solve are incredibly complex, this opportunity to ideate and brainstorm with different team members is one of the most important benefits.

The Future of Gemba at Hirsh Precision

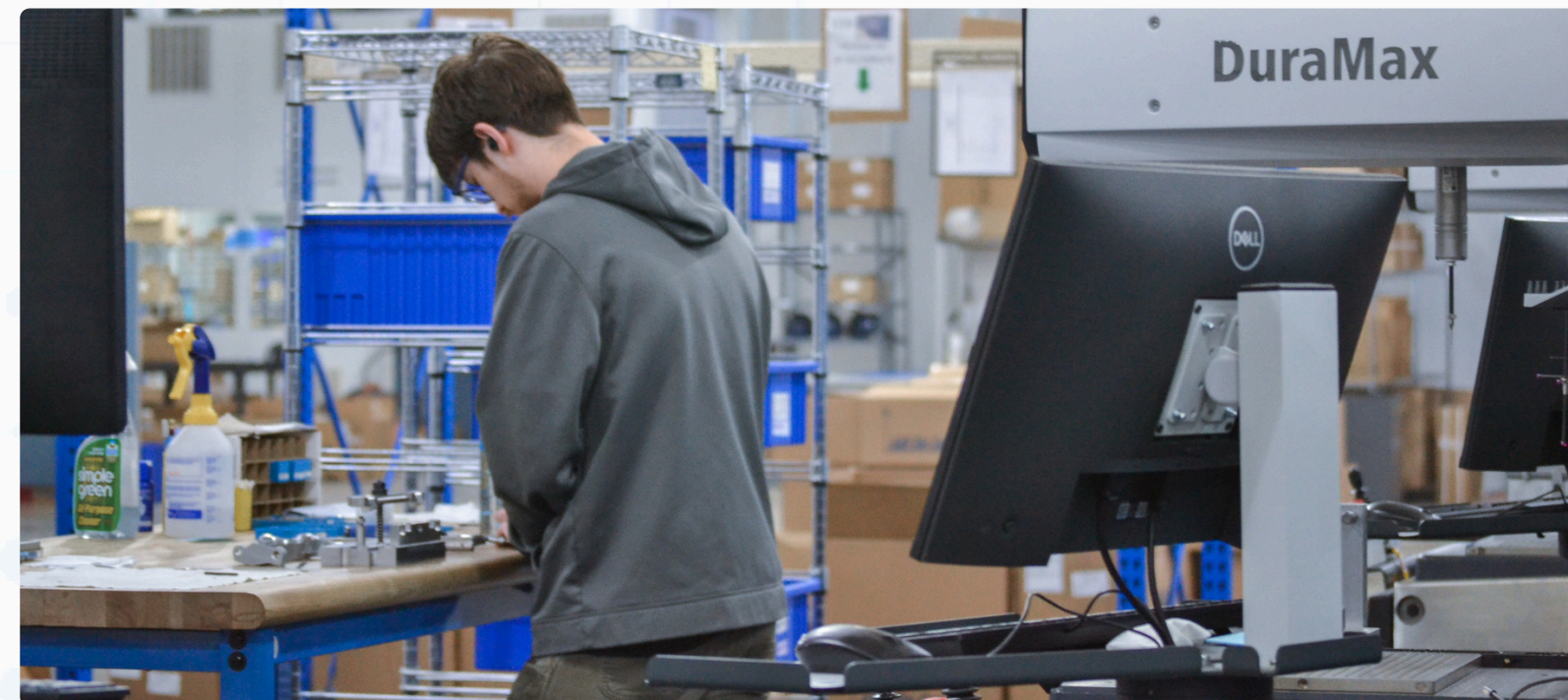
Given the history of false starts and failed adoptions, our organization-wide implementation and year-long execution of daily Gemba Walks is a major milestone for our team; but there's more work to be done.

How we execute Gemba is fairly standard across the industry, which is a logical starting point; they're best practices for a reason.

That being said, there are certainly more opportunities and benefits that come with a higher degree of customization on top of the standard Gemba practices.

Whether your organization is a job shop or a large enterprise, no production floor or customer base looks the same.

Tailoring the Gemba Walk to your team, your manufacturing capabilities and the type of work that hits your production floor will drive more of the benefits that standard practices provide - and that's the next step for Hirsh Precision's Gemba practices.



Resources

About Hirsh Precision

Hirsh Precision is a high-mix, high-volume CNC machining solution provider for the medical device, aerospace and industrial sectors.

Our DFM, machining, and post-machining processes support OEMs from the design stage all the way through product launch.

Resources

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