Walk Waste Out the Door—The Why, What and How

By

Karen Jevsevar, USAF/A9L

The match has been lit and the platform is burning—40,000 positions have been taken off the books. As the faces fade out over the next two years, the heat will increase as the 315,000 Active Duty remaining airmen continue to face a challenging mission -- delivering combat capability to the warfighter. What do we do to ensure those airmen don't get burned, or should I say, don't get burned out?

We do what we've always done when faced with difficult personnel cuts—"do more with less," right? Wrong. According to Senior AF leadership, we have to find a way "to do less with less." Translation—in the 21st century, we have to do things smarter. So, how do we get there from here?

Air Force Smart Operations for the 21st Century is the vehicle for this journey, providing a methodology to improve our processes end-to-end, through the eyes of the customer. Unlike traditional improvement programs that focused on working harder, working longer, and increasing resources to increase effectiveness, AFSO21 uses LEAN--the endless pursuit of perfection through the identification and elimination of waste, adapting to change, and continuous process improvement.

Having now served for 22 years in the Air Force (active duty and civilian), as many of you, I take pride in effectiveness, efficiency, multi-tasking, and doing whatever it takes to get the job done, regardless of the hours required. Six months ago, if anyone would have suggested there was waste in my processes, I most definitely would have taken offense. But that was then.

In June 2006, I became a candidate in the AFSO21 Level II Master Process Officer Certification Program. After a one- week indoctrination and spin up at the University of Tennessee, we were each assigned to a team of six and began our journey with a mentor and a new toolkit containing a new set of 'lenses' and newfound knowledge. Through planning and participating in six LEAN events over the following six months, along with continued education through reading and sessions with our mentor, our knowledge and experience grew. Our vision also cleared as we grew more comfortable with the new lenses with which we viewed the world.

As a certified AFSO21 Level III Master Process Officer, I understand "waste" isn't a judgment or a criticism. It is merely the reality of most traditional process--over 80% of the steps done by people and machines are waste; however, it may not be as easy to recognize as you would think. It requires new sight—the ability to challenge tradition and "see" what we do as a process. Once you master the ability to "see," you will never be the same--it will become second nature to see the waste in processes, both personal and professional. You won't be able to turn it off.

Any action taken and any time spent that doesn't add value to the product or service from the customer's perspective is waste. Think of waste as anything that takes time, resources, or space, but does not add to the value or service delivered to the customer--production and administration. Waste is human activity absorbing resources, but creating no value as defined by the ultimate customer. As you can see the common theme here is the customer. The customer for the Air Force is a little more difficult to define at times; nevertheless, their perspective is the lens through which we must look in the 21st Century.

LEAN targets eight types of wastes:

> *OVERPRODUCTION* – Working faster than the next customer can process
> *INVENTORY* – Having more files than can be processed during a specified period of time
> *MOTION* – Searching for data/files; unnecessary movement of data/files
> *TRANSPORTATION* – Physical hand carry of data/files
> *WAITING* – Waiting on data/files, approvals/signatures, information/responses
> *UNDERUTILIZED TALENT* – Not recognizing skill sets people bring to the job
> *DEFECTS* – Inspection/approvals; inaccurate/incorrect data; rework; cancellations
> *EXTRA PROCESSING* – Doing more than required by next customer/process

In other words--moving, piling, un-piling, fixing, walking, copying, documenting, searching, rewriting, rereading, meeting, loading, unloading, traveling, discussing…etc. Though a bit easier to see on a shop floor, waste is alive and well in our transactional (administrative) and processes.

Bear with me now. I want you to visually staple yourself to the product you're delivering to your customer. Measure the total time the product lives in the process (cycle time). Now measure the touch time—the actual time spent working on the product. Keep in mind that sitting in an inbox, being hand carried to the next office, the time it takes you to log in to a system, etc., contributes to the cycle time; however, it is not touch time--value added through the eyes of the customer. Now imagine you eliminate that waste. Not only will you reduce your product cycle time, but you'll also recover capacity you didn't realize you had. Do you get the picture?

As AFSO21 is deployed across the Air Force, you will be hearing the terms LEAN event and Rapid Improvement Event. These types of AFSO21 events are necessary in many cases, but process improvement is not dependent upon an event. The success of AFSO21 relies on the Air Force seeing its waste, and making reduction a lifestyle.

I hope I've piqued your interest in AFSO21 and I challenge you to master this ability to "see," then you will be able to "walk the waste" out the door.