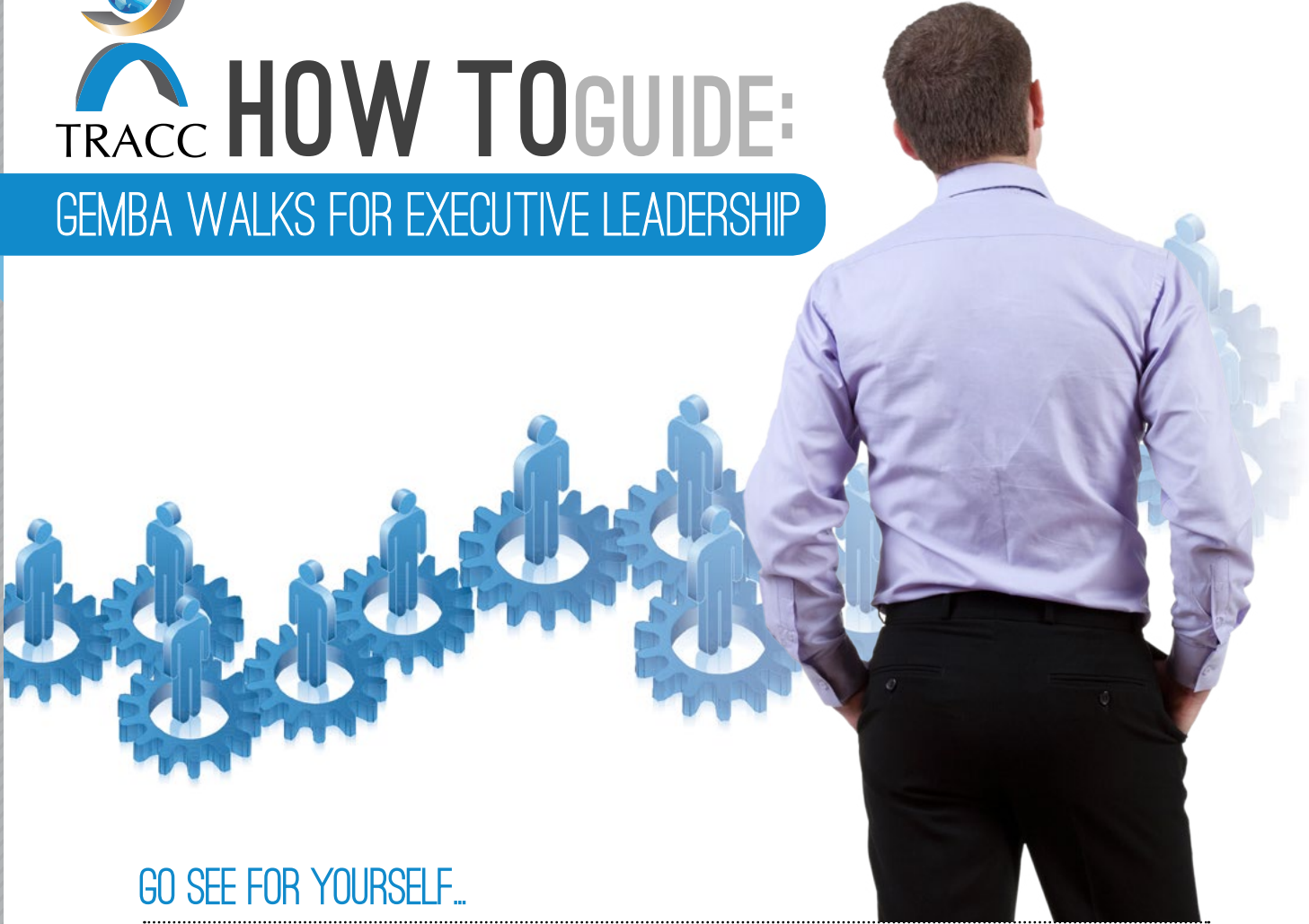




HOW TO GUIDE:

GEMBA WALKS FOR EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP



GO SEE FOR YOURSELF...



Direct observation — **see for yourself** — is not only the keystone for Lean or TPM, it is the underpinning of all science. **No second-hand information** will be a substitution for being there. It's the best way to get the information you need to make the best possible decisions — usually in the most efficient possible manner.

This is known as the **gemba walk**. Sadly though, most executives do not make proper use of this time spent walking around, simply because they **don't know what the purpose** of this walk really is.



A GEMBA WALK is the **C** in the **Plan-Do-Check-Act** problem-solving model for **sustainable improvement**: Checking to make sure that standards are being followed, that problems are getting corrected and that processes are working the way they're intended to, and if not, to find out why.

In other words, to check the health of your leadership systems by looking at how they engage their people and processes. The gemba walk takes the management and senior executives of an organisation to the **'real place'** where value is created in a business, be it the shop floor, warehouse, utility lines on site or office environment.

The **idea** of the gemba walk is simple: **go to the place, look at the process, and talk with the people**. This encourages leaders to talk to process owners, and to observe and understand the processes carried out on a daily basis. It enables executive management to be aware of the successes and challenges faced, in an effort to improve efficiency through effective resolution of problems and to guide corrective actions. It will also encourage you to view the business with **'new' eyes**.

WHY DO A GEMBA WALK?

- **It helps build relationships** with those who do the work and create value in the organisation — meeting the team members and helping them to do their job better is vital to team building and team effectiveness.
- **Talking to and interacting with employees** at the gemba regularly gives you the opportunity to find out about any problems faced, and **ensure that the underlying systems issues are appropriately addressed. It prevents problems developing** into critical issues due to them not getting the attention required by management early on.
- **It fosters the key role of leaders in coaching through questioning.** Done well, it not only results in leaders teaching the system, but it establishes norms of how leaders are expected to behave and spend their time, and it helps employees understand what is important at both a technical and management process level. Importantly, it **provides leaders with direct experience of what is actually happening** in the organisation. So both leader and process worker/area leader are simultaneously teaching and learning.
- A gemba walk **provides another channel** for leaders to **praise people for the good work that they do.** One of the biggest complaints employees have is they feel that their work is not appreciated or recognised by management.
- Management can be sure the **work that needs to be done is getting done.**
- If not, goals and objectives can be **clearly communicated face-to-face.**
- By being a visible leader, you can **increase the engagement of your people.**



The currency of leadership is presence. Where leaders spend their time determines what is important to the organisation.



“

Management by walking around is hardly ever effective. The reason is that someone in management, walking around, has little idea about what questions to ask, and usually does not pause long enough at any spot to get the right answer.

”

- W. Edwards Deming, *Out of the Crisis*

GEMBA WALK APPROACH

Team members are usually very concerned when a senior executive shows up and starts asking questions. The way questions are asked has a profound impact on how they are perceived, and as a result the question can be seen as threatening rather than evidence of a supportive leadership approach. As an executive you don't go to the gemba to tell employees how to do their job, you **go to ask and understand** what they need to do their job. You're looking to challenge team members to **think about a problem**.

Leaders should therefore embrace their role in the problem-solving process as one of an enabler who **encourages at all levels**. An enabler is not there to provide answers and solve problems. Rather, the enabler **asks guiding and probing questions** that help process owners and teams to **identify their own problems** and solutions by asking **what, why, what if, and why not**, in that order.



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GEMBA WALK PROCESS AND PROTOCOL

Whether a gemba walk is a part of operational management's daily routine or a part of an executive leadership team's site or office walk, for the walk to be effective it is important to ensure that the parties involved follow an **established protocol**, and are aware of the process and the **purpose of the walk**.

Think of building your operating system from the **value-creating worker** out. Observe the worker and steadily take away each and every bit of **non-value-adding 'work'**. Continue doing that, engaging the worker in the process, until nothing is left except value-adding work; until all the waste has been eliminated, and non-value-adding work isolated and distributed to support operations.

Once you have captured your observations, it is best to **test and validate** your conclusions with those doing the work. This is not the only input, but it is one way to understand if you have a good handle on the **current reality**.



The key to a successful gemba walk is to always focus on process — when you have your processes right, the results will take care of themselves.



FOUR STEPS TO GEMBA SUCCESS:

1. **Know** your purpose
2. **Know** your gemba
3. **Observe** the framework
4. **Validate**

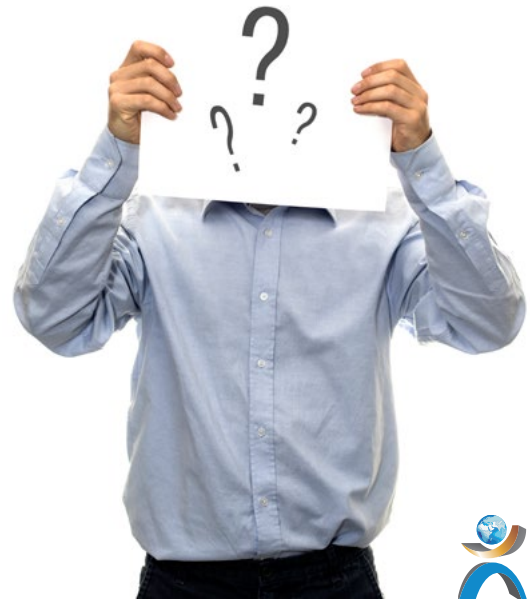


Note: If you want to see change, think about what it is that you need to change about yourself which should create the change you wish to see at the gemba.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

The nature of the questions you would ask during a gemba walk would vary based on the current culture of the company, whether it is conducted as part of the daily management process or whether it forms part of an executive leadership team visit. In the case of the latter, you as an executive will need to **first gain an understanding** of the type of processes carried out and then move on to process-specific questions.

Leaders on a gemba walk need to realise that they cannot and should not provide the answers and solutions to the problems they encounter. They are primarily there to **coach the process owners** to take ownership of solving problems and developing solutions to make the process more effective and efficient, **through the elimination of waste**.



Mike Rother has done an admirable job in his book, *Toyota Kata*, for creating the right approach for a coaching conversation. Based on research into how Toyota manages people, he has formulated a five-question coaching dialogue.

The five Kata questions are:

1. What is the target condition?
2. What is the actual condition now?
3. What obstacles do you think are preventing you from reaching the target condition and which one are you addressing now?
4. What is your next step or experiment and what do you expect to happen?
5. How quickly can we find out what we have learnt from taking that step?



ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Since each gemba walk is unique, leaders would need to formulate their own questions, and also ask unplanned questions as queries arise. Examples of some own and unplanned questions to prompt further discussion could be the following:



1. What are you doing now?
2. Is there an established, documented standard process for completing this activity?
3. What challenges do you face?
4. How do you identify a challenge?
5. What can you fix?
6. What can't you fix?
7. Who do you speak to when something goes wrong?
8. Do you use a visual management board?
9. If yes, is it useful?
10. If no, why?



Note: These questions are only meant to provide guidance and do not represent a strict process that needs to be followed.

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

12 STEPS TO INTEGRATE A GEMBA WALK INTO YOUR SITE VISIT:

1. **Inform site(s) or department(s)** in advance that you will be visiting and carrying out a gemba walk.
2. **Respect the site or department work process** and arrive at an agreed time in the required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
3. **Introduce yourself** and set context to the visit.
4. Let it be known that you will **feedback** with your thoughts and observations.
5. Be thoughtful about **group size**.
6. **Request the process owner** to accompany you on your walk.
7. Take a walk through the **core activities** of the area or process being visited:
 - Product and process development
 - Supplier management
 - Customer management and support
 - Fulfilment from order to delivery
 - General management system — (“What do managers do?”; “How do managers lead?”)
8. **Ask** open ended questions.
9. **Listen**.
10. **Be discreet** with the observation sheet, e.g. ask permission to make notes.
11. **Encourage** the site or office to provide their honest feedback on the gemba walk and how it was conducted.
12. Once you have completed and captured your observations, test and validate your conclusions with those doing the work. This is not the only input, but it is one way to understand if you have a good handle on the current reality.





Performed properly, the gemba walk is a much more powerful management approach than sitting at an executive desk filling out a survey. And like any new process, gemba walks may initially be confusing, time consuming and difficult to perform. **Plan-Do-Check-Act** ... do not give up, stay focused, and it will work for you and your organisation.

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