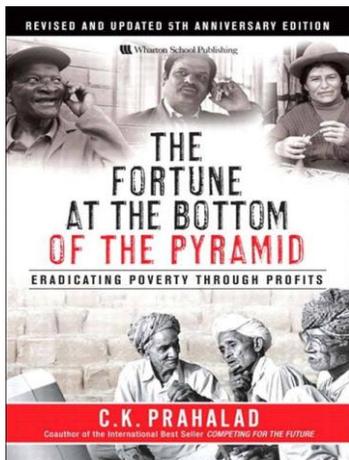


Creating a Corporate Army of Problem-Solvers

By Rey Elbo

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Author, “Total Quality by Maximization” (2016)*

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How would you improve this work process without spending money and save hundreds of thousands in the process?



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REY ELBO is the former Country Director of Kaizen Institute (Philippines), established in 1999 with Masaaki Imai, kaizen guru and international bestselling author. Mr. Elbo is the author of Total Quality by Maximization (2016) and former head of HR and TQM departments of five major corporations.



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Objectives

1. To accelerate and systematize the discovery of costly operational problems and generate as many low-cost and common solutions.
2. To promote a corporate-wide culture of Kaizen (continuous improvement) and make it a daily habit for all stakeholders.
3. To encourage all workers to participate in problem-solving and decision-making under the principle of industrial democracy.
4. To create an atmosphere of a creative, fun, and lively work environment where everyone becomes a business partner.
5. To give proper and practical non-cash recognition to all teams and workers who deserve the award.

Tasks of an Army of Problem-Solvers or Kaizen Teams

1. All employees regardless of employment status, including middle managers, project engineers, and key personnel are required to join Kaizen Teams and submit at least one cost-saving idea not later every end of the month. The one-idea a month target maybe increased or stretched out in due time.
2. All Kaizen Teams are composed of not more than 5-6 members each team, coming from the same unit, section, or department. If needed, they can invite other members from other departments to share more information or give different perspectives from time-to-time.
3. All Kaizen Teams must meet around two hours a week, during office hours to discuss, explore, and finalize cost-saving ideas classified under the DOWNTIME activity in the Kaizen Blitz workshop. Priority is given to the recurring, costly or non-value added policies, systems or work procedures.
4. All Kaizen Teams must read and fully understand workbook “Total Quality by Maximization” and follow the 8-Step Problem-Solving Process included in the Kaizen Blitz workshop for corporate-wide consistency and uniformity.
5. All Kaizen Teams may rotate the job of a leader-facilitator, recording secretary, time-keeper, and devil’s advocate every month. The job of a leader is to facilitate discovery of low-cost solutions and act as a referee in case of any dispute or in case the members are unwittingly paralyzed by over-analysis. If this happens, any member may call for a secret balloting to decide on the issues.
6. All Kaizen Teams are required to deliver a brief presentation to support its request for approval of their ideas prior to implementation. In doing this, the Mancom (or a Steering Committee) has the ultimate authority and responsibility to approve all projects or defer action on any project should it need more data, time or further study on the matter, but not to exceed 30 days.

Kaizen Teams' Code of Conduct

- 1. Weekly Meetings.** All meetings must start and end on time to ensure a productive experience for all team members on a certain mutually-agreed time and day. The teams may decide to extend their working hours, however, the company is not required to pay any overtime premium or provide meals. In case of the absence of a member, the regular meeting with majority of members present must proceed as scheduled to avoid delay in project completion. Under no circumstances that meetings are disturbed, postponed, or cancelled unless in case of an emergency.
- 2. Meeting Venue.** The use of meeting rooms and office facilities must be synchronized with other groups so that conflict in scheduling is eliminated. This also applies in the use of laptop computers, LCD projector, etc.
- 3. Kaizen Team Leader.** Usually, s/he is the unit leader, supervisor or someone who owns the process or system to be resolved. However, all team members must be given the chance to perform the role and prepare them for some leadership roles in the future. His/her role is to facilitate the efficient resolution of a problem, encourage passive members to speak up, and resolve disputes with the help of other members, without imposing his/her ideas or opinion to the group.
- 4. Preparation.** All team members must come to all meetings prepared with all factual information needed for that particular meeting. Members are expected to do their homework and assigned tasks prior to each meeting.

Recognition Program for Kaizen Teams

- 1. SPECIAL AWARDS.** Mancom is mandated to give special awards to deserving Kaizen Teams under the following monthly categories: (a) Simplest and Impactful Idea Award (b) Most Innovative Low-Cost Idea Award (c) Highest Quality Assurance Award (d) Biggest Waiting Time Reduction Award and (e) The President's Award for Best Kaizen Team. The annual awarding ceremony is held at the end of each year (or timed with the Christmas Party), for the same categories to different Kaizen Teams.
- 2. AWARD PRIZE.** It must be in non-cash and may follow the loyalty reward points used by the credit card industry. Non-cash reward is recommended as it has no tax requirement from employees and the company and is recommended to be enjoyed by the employee's family members, like home appliances.
- 3. AWARD POINTS.** All Kaizen Team members must equally divide the points earned among themselves following the rules to be issued by Mancom to ensure a fair distribution system. The system may include the rules that give preference to team members who are voted by the team as the most active in the problem-solving process.
- 4. AWARD REDEMPTION.** As soon as the appropriate points are declared issued to Kaizen Teams, the members may redeem the equivalent of the prize from the CEO who issues a check payment in favor of a home appliance retailer or educational institution for those with children of school age. Under no circumstances that a check must be payable to an individual team member. This is also to ensure a family-oriented type of award.
- 5. JAPAN TRIP.** In case where a Kaizen Team has discovered an extra-ordinary cost saving idea amounting to at least five million a year and verified independently by the accounting department and external parties, all team members may be sent to an all-expenses trip to Japan for a one-week visit to Toyota factories and its suppliers.

Other Strategic Tips to Ensure Success

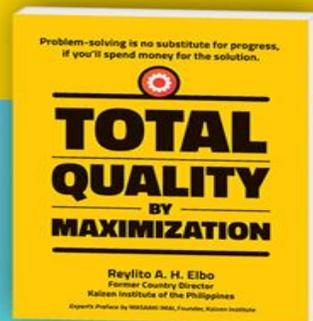
1. **Agenda.** Define and follow a meeting agenda or goal sheet that must be completed by Kaizen Teams without fail each meeting.
2. **Visual Dashboard.** Maintain a Problem-Solving Dashboard inside the Kaizen Team's work area as a visual reminder for members about their respective tasks, issues, ideas, and other concerns.
3. **Support.** Show active support of the CEO and/or Mancom member to all Kaizen Teams by visiting meetings. However, he is discouraged from giving opinion or ideas to allow them unhampered discussions.
4. **References.** Encourage Kaizen Teams to study pertinent materials on creative problem-solving from the Internet or elsewhere and try other exercises in the prescribed handbook.
5. **Low-Cost Solutions.** Generate only low-cost ideas by brainstorming and allow people to share as many out-of-this-world or crazy ideas. The rule, of course is to get as many ideas as possible.
6. **Respect People.** Respect ideas and be patient with people who are having difficulties in contributing to Kaizen team meetings. Encourage them to contribute by being positive at all times.
7. **No Employee Dismissal.** Under no circumstances that employees' services must be terminated as a result of a cost-saving idea. The concerned employees may only be transferred to another work area.

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This program demonstrates the powerful effect of continuous improvement using low-cost, common sense solutions and how an army of problem-solvers can make it happen everyday and everywhere.



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