



Gemba Walk:

Networking tool within the Organization

Md. Sarwar Hossen FCA, FCMA
Group Chief Financial Officer
Biopharma Limited
dusarwar@yahoo.com

Abstract

Gemba walk is a management tool for networking with executives. It is walking around the real place of value addition which is, where the actual work is being done. There are many industry successes by using Gemba Walk. However, precautions are required for practicing this management technique. Using Gemba Walk following specific guidelines will certainly result in enormous benefit to the organization

Keywords : Gemba Walk, Management by Walking / Wandering Around (MBWA), Taiichi Ohno.

I. Introduction

Over the years, businesses have transcended from its primitive proprietorship form to partnership to large corporate houses. With the passage of time and in line with growth, corporate houses are hiring more manpower to get the job done within "toughest" deadline. Management is getting job done by others. To get the job done by executives, managers sometimes face difficulty to stay tuned with the executives. Due to the dearth of interaction with the executives, time, money and other resources get wasted and the triple E (effectiveness, efficiency, economy) of resources is hardly achieved. One of such tools of interaction with the executives by the top management is the "Gemba Walk". Gemba walk is a very popular tool to stay connected with the team members. It is also known as MBWA (Management by Walking Around). It is the practice by the managers to walk around the floor, talk to the executives, work alongside them, if needed, ask questions, and be there to help when needed. Instead of asking the executives to the manager's desk with their problems, it is expected in Gemba Walk that the managers will try to walk to the executives to solve their problems.

The Gemba Walk is an opportunity for top management to stand back from their day-to-day tasks to walk the floor of their workplace to identify wasteful activities. It is designed to allow leaders to identify existing safety hazards, observe machinery and equipment conditions, ask about the practiced standards, gain knowledge about the work status and build relationships with employees. The objective of Gemba Walk is to understand the value stream and its problems rather than review results or make superficial comments.

Taiichi Ohno, an executive at Toyota, led the development of the concept of the Gemba Walk. Gemba is a Japanese word meaning "the real place", a place where ultimate work is actually done or value is created. For example, in the production process, the production floor/line is the real place of working for the production workers. The production manager is to walk around the floor to interact with the production workforce.

2. Benefits of Using Gemba Walk

Benefit of using Gemba Walk is manifold. Developing the best understanding of the functions and process is the most important benefit for using Gemba Walk. It narrows down the gap between the managers and the executives and bridges the relationship amongst them. The approachability between management and employees certainly increases. When staff members treat their leaders as a person not as a "boss", they will more likely to tell the fact which will help management to learn about the issues before they become problems. Instead of creating a bossing environment, it develops a brotherly atmosphere within the company.

Trust among employees also gets better as people get to know each other better through regular interactions. In turn, people will be inclined to share more information and eventually communication barriers are broken down. Morality of staff members definitely goes up as they feel better about their jobs and organisation when they have opportunities to be heard. As a result, productivity also goes up. Many innovative ideas often do come up from casual exchanges.

3. Precautionary measures for practicing Gemba Walk

Obviously, Gemba Walk has its side effects unless used properly. Even, the entire concept may be counterproductive if it is not applied with a proper intent and objectives behind. To get the best out of this, it takes more than simply strolling through the office, warehouse, or production facility. Senior leaders must remember it is not just a "walk in the park": they have to be absolutely genuine in their efforts to understand their staff, what they do, and what the leaders can do to make staff work more effectively.

When someone treats Gemba Walk just as an obligation, this probably will not work very well. Managers have to sincerely want to get to know employees and operations, and they have to commit to following up concerns and seeking continuous improvement.

4. Techniques for using Gemba Walk

- a. **Management by Objective (MBO):** Communicate and share company vision, goals, values, strategies with all staff members. If the whole organisation is not

tuned, success is hard to come by.

- b. **Give thy ears and close your lip:** Instead of sharing your ideas, ask people to come up with their views and thoughts. People need to realise -- ideas are sought in order to make things better for them.
- c. **Openness:** Be candid in your approach while talking to your colleagues. Avoid formal ways of conversation as it results in rigid responses most of the time.
- d. **Listen passionately:** People tend to be more interested in talking and sharing when they see leaders are paying due attention.
- e. **Be neutral:** An equal amount of time and focus need to be invested in every function. Biasness towards a section of people or function might ruin the whole purpose. A leader must be approachable by everyone in the organisation.
- f. **Immediate recognition:** Recognize people's success immediately. When things are not going right, avoid giving immediate feedback in public. This should be done later on in private.
- g. **No falsification:** Be absolutely open and honest while answering any query or question. In case you do not have the right answer, please admit that, follow up and get back. If you are not in a position to share something, please say it upfront. Hiding facts or saying half-truths could completely destroy the trust.
- h. **Beyond office:** Do not always talk about "work" only. Try to build relationship with your staff at a personal level. Simple things like smile, cracking jokes, and patting on the back have greater impact on building relationship.

5. Conclusion:

Gemba walk is not a new concept. Perhaps we all are following this practice in our offices, may be in different form but in oblivion of the fact that we are practicing Gemba Walk. The intention should be clear in mind so that maximum benefit is derived. It is not that it is very hard to practice; rather it is easy and it incurs almost no additional cost to the organization.

[Sources: Various articles published in the Internet]