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Special Feature : Toyota Motor & Lean Production System #3

Toyota Production System is a Boom but There are Some Traps

.Not a few Americans often ask this question to Toyota US managers after they have visited Kentucky Plant of Toyota Motor Mfg. Inc. "Today, we have visited Plants A,B,C,D,& E which are some what familiar with us even in USA, but you failed to take us to Plant G in which you keep special secret machines to make Toyota the best company".

The Toyota U.S. managers are embarrassed by this question and simply reply " We have no Plant G at all". Not only Americas, but also many Japanese managers find it difficult to understand how TPS is to function. TPS is not a machine, it functions like organisms.

TPS does not function by standard manuals but you need to understand what roles you should play as top managers, middle managers, engineers, supervisors and workers to act like living cell.

According to the latest issue of Nikkei Business (April 12, 2004), one of the most important KFS(Key For Success) is CEO's strong visible support in Gemba. Fujio Mitarai, CEO of Canon, started the cell production in 1997 by learning from Sony and is now more better in implementation of TPS than Sony. The reason is that he firmly believes in TPS and is pushing TPS by actively involving himself with his employees in Gemba. Canon has reduced inventory from 23 days to 4 days by the cell production system. On the other hand, Minoru Morio, vice chairman of Sony, admits that Kaizen and Kaikaku have been at a standstill sometimes at Sony due to lukewarm top management support.

The consultant was cancelled by halves. There are three important lessons that you have to learn about TPS or Kaizen in general.

First -----Prepare and provide ever new management stimulus to keep continuous important process.

Second ---Be resolved to even have backfire at first : Some old managers react negatively.

Third --- Have enough time to train employees in new Kaizen culture : Be patient.

