

**Spring 2008**

**Report from Western Region**

It was almost a decade ago that I heard the term “kaizen”. This is the Japanese terminology for a lean manufacturing system. It was a concept that they had brought into the contact centres. I asked at the time to explain why we would be using that terminology and was told that it was not the same thing at all. I was told it was more to embrace change. Kaizen is the process that was first developed in the auto industry. You have a team on an assembly line that works at a certain pace. Just for simplicity, let's say 5 people in the team and current top production is at 5 cars for that day. The team is given an additional person but told that there is expectation of more than 1 extra car, given their current expertise. The team pushes together and with very hard work starts to manufacture 7 cars within a day. The pace is harder and there is wear and tear on their bodies as they push this new rate through. They advise that this is getting done but at a cost as physically they are really only able to do the 1 car per person rate. They are told, we are so proud of you, you are doing what we thought you could do and that is 7 so 7 is where the expectation will stay. A few months later when this team is constantly putting out 7 cars, they are told there will be layoffs. They must streamline and the team loses a person. The team is back down to where it was but is also told that when they pulled it together they had done 7 cars so now the expectation is at least 6. Just because you lost one person, statistically we know you can do this so the expectation remains. It took the Japanese manufacturing world years to learn that people are not expendable and that in the end this system does not work.

Is this story sounding familiar? Nothing has changed since kaizen was brought in almost ten years ago. In fact, the change has been that the system has spread into other departments and more Japanese manufacturing fundamentals have also been brought in, which all serve the same purpose. To try and get more labour from already overworked, stressed out workers. Health and Safety is “sold” to everyone in their performance magazines, pamphlets, intercoms, to the public, etc.. The true reality is that this is not applied at the worksite. We may not be the manufacturing process in the postal system but they are applying this principle to more and more of our departments. We are being “sold” that we need to do this for cost effectiveness yet we are making more and more monies each and every year. We are being “sold” that we can do

with less because we are not the revenue generators of the corporation yet everyone knows that if you do not have a healthy infrastructure that can run and support your company seamlessly, you are not a success. Customer service is the measurement, internal and external. We are being "sold" that they are concerned about health and safety yet our sick and stress rates are higher than ever before. In fact, they are putting higher expectations on people that are already past their threshold of safe workload. They also put a new bully system in called ManuLife to try and punish those whose systems are now breaking from kaizen. Why is it that we need to be the guinea pigs across the ocean? You would think that leadership could figure it all out from the pages of statistical data rather than manually burning people out. Everyone knows that the Japanese system did break with major costs to the people in the end. This is wrong.

Last week I was advised that again the employees will be doing surveys to list what they do each day/week/month. We are being "sold" that there is duplication. Again, they are moving work in order to try and confuse the issues. They say more streamlining. Bottom line, each time they reorganize the work, we get downgraded, the expectation is for us to do more work with less resources. There is no backup system for annual leave; people cannot even get the rest they need at that period because they go back to a job that was not properly maintained in their absence. The people that remain also get burnt as they are being forced to do work they should not be doing. People should only do their work, this is what they are hired for. Their work is enough and I am being told time and time again that they have issues trying to get it done. Meanwhile, they are bullied some more. If the Corporation wants other work than yours done, then they should have someone act. Our work does not go away so if someone is on annual leave and their work needs to be done, then the Corporation needs to arrange for someone to act. You do not do both. I am hearing from people that have been at work over 20 years that are now thinking of looking for something else because the burnout is not worth the benefits and pension plan. We are being "sold" that the new generation is the issue and that they don't have loyalty. Well, let's be honest, who would have loyalty when there is no respect for you. No one is blind. At the end of the day, you could have a major health issue just as you retire from Canada Post. You gave more than you should have,

trying to maintain balance in an unbalanced environment, trying to combat the ever-pounding stress that is building and not being relieved. Finally you retire and instead you spend years combating health issues that possibly never would have been an issue if you had been at a respectful, healthy workplace, which Canada Post no longer is.

In 1999, in 2002, in 2006, now in 2008 again people are being asked to describe what they do in a day. What is wrong with this picture. Should Canada Post not already understand what we do. Each and every time, we lose more people, the people that remain have more work, they are again downgraded as they are told that their work is just not that valued.

I keep hearing that Canada Post does not understand why the Employee Satisfaction is down. This is the battle that is ongoing for us and our members - ignorance and arrogance. What happened to our value. How smoothly would things run without the 3000 of us. Remember that approximately 20 years ago there were 7000 of us getting this work done.

Respectfully submitted to the national executive and the membership,

In solidarity,

Janet May