

# Create results that stick: Leverage a continuous improvement process

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Many leaders try to improve results through short-term programs that have little to no sticking power. How do you improve in a way that embeds employee engagement as a routine, continuous improvement habit for everyone?

One way is to use the small wins I discussed in an earlier **CW Observer** article. Small wins enable you to use lower-risk experiments to improve performance and then replicate them throughout your organization.

It's important to understand that we're not replicating small wins. We're replicating a system and a way of doing work to produce better results that stick.

The system includes six levers:

## 1. Leadership

There needs to be clear financial and non-financial expectations of leaders. Goals must be aligned with the desired results. Leaders need to be assessed, developed and held accountable for meeting or exceeding expectations.

## 2. Measurement

Measurement powerfully communicates what's important. Key performance indicators **must represent the critical few** that reflect the health of the business. These indicators need to be drilled down into the organization so that every employee knows how he or she can influence measures that drive the organization's overall success.

## 3. Communication

A strategic story includes five information categories that lead to high performance (context, vision and strategy, linkage, role and support). The story then needs to be embedded into the operations so everyone in the organization understands how the "say communication" translates to what's actually done. Scoreboards and regular huddling processes help to rigorously and continuously improve performance.

#### 4. Work processes

Organize performance improvement teams to attack specific areas of under-performance. One of our clients cut warehouse damage by 65 percent and improved productivity by 15 percent. Another cut scrap and rework by 60 percent in a couple of weeks. These successes created momentum for much larger, company-wide improvements.

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#### 5. Rewards / recognition

Drive the behaviors that lead to success through rewards and recognition. In one of our projects, the client's rewards system over-emphasized productivity at the expense of quality. Too much emphasis on productivity can cause people to hurry, make mistakes and inadvertently create costly scrap and rework. We adjusted the reward weightings to create better balance.

#### 6. Learning and development

A high priority needs to be placed on continuous learning. People in the organization need the right skills and knowledge to perform at their peak. In many organizations, this manifests as making sure first-line leaders have the skills, knowledge and time they need to lead.

When this system is aligned to the organization's goals, the organization has a new and better way to do work that creates better results. The system is not a program; it's at the heart of the culture. It's a continuous improvement process that's never ending. Organizations with this system in place brim with enthusiasm. The environment becomes electric. People are excited because they're involved, in control of a piece of their destiny, they feel valued and part of a winning team.



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Jim Shaffer, IABC Fellow, is an internationally recognized business adviser, author, speaker and leader of the Jim Shaffer Group. Shaffer was a principal and global leader of a Towers Perrin center of excellence. He was a practitioner in the firm's change management consulting practice. He is the author of the book *The Leadership Solution*, and his clients have included some of the world's most respected brands.

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