

THE MEANING OF STANDARDS

Taiichi Ohno taught us that there can be no improvements without standards. I like to think of the standard as *the best known documented method at a given moment that we all agree to be accountable to until we improve it together*. Once an improvement has been made, it's up to every worker to maintain that standard. Showing up on time for work, therefore, was only one of many standards that we were expected to follow at Toyota.

Looking at the big picture, the standard of 60 seconds was really the sum and total of literally thousands of local standards. We had standards for how long each part of or process took, down to the second. We had standards for safety, quality, ergonomics, and mental burden. We had standards for how we held our tools, how we as leaders reviewed each and every one of our processes, and how we interacted with each of our team members. In fact, the number of standards we had to internalize is a great illustration of the extraordinary commitment behind DNA.

Now, it's important to point out here that standards aren't just about making cars faster. TMMK was equally concerned with avoiding stress and monotony for workers. To that end, Ohno also said, "Why not make the work easier and more interesting so that people do not have to sweat?" The Toyota style is not to improve results by working harder – it is, as Deming said, about worker smarter. It is a way of thinking that says there is no limit to people's creativity when it comes to improving their processes. We might say that people don't come to Toyota every day to work, they come here to think. In a similar vein, we like to think of Toyota as a company that develops people first, and just happens to make cars!

“EIGHT YOU'RE FINE, NINE YOU'RE MINE”

From a psychological standpoint, our relationship with standards can be fairly complex. Let's look at an example that we're all familiar with – speed limits.

Every road you drive on is going to have a speed limit. Even on a back road with no signs, you have to follow the stated limit. Now, it's not unusual for people to break the law at some time or other. Sometimes it's knowingly, sometimes it's unknowingly. Maybe we're just in a hurry, we're not paying attention, or it's "wait a minute, the zone changed, it went down." But there's no confusion about what the law says, and in our system, ignorance of the law is no excuse.

Of course, speed limits have a purpose – to ensure that our roads are safe. The problem is, we may feel that the standard is too restricting for our purposes. So we figure out what the limits are, and what we can get away with. If we go a few miles per hour too fast, law enforcement will probably leave us alone. In Kentucky, we often hear the expression, "Eight you're fine, nine you're mine."

People tend to set their own standards based on that expectation – maybe they set the cruise control at 8 mph over the limit. Or maybe they take a bit of a risk now and then – there certainly aren't enough cops on the road to catch everybody who is speeding. Whether or not the standard is followed, therefore, is subject to a degree of personal choice at this point.

Now let's look at this through a different lens. What if your state, or your province, passed a zero-tolerance law – say, you'd lose your driver's license if an officer caught you going one mile per hour over the limit? Behaviours would change in a hurry.

People would be pretty careful, and nobody would pass you going 15 miles per hour faster. You just wouldn't take that risk, even if there wasn't a cop in sight.

We can often get a similar respect for a law or standard when we reflect on its purpose. For instance, we all know the feeling of frustration we get when we drive into a construction zone and the speed limit drops from, say, 60 mph to 45 mph. But if we think for a moment about the construction workers that are working very close to the roadway, and their families who are waiting for them to return home safely, that 45 mph takes on a very different meaning.

All of this illustrates the mindset behind our relationship with standards. It's a deeply ingrained idea at Toyota that standards are something all workers are committed to, whether it's showing up for work exactly on time, or any of the other standards that we have to maintain every day. This is not a matter of personal choice.

Furthermore, we were deeply connected with the "why" behind the standards, and how fulfillment of that purpose depends on all of us. A constant reminder for us was the fact that in the Toyota Production System, a deviation from standard may well cause a line to be shut down. So that constant awareness of standards on the part of every employee literally keeps the plant running.

Of course, there's no way a trainer or a manager could possibly enforce all the standards we had to follow, and this leads us to another important point: *DNA is how people behave when nobody's looking.*

DNA, therefore, has to be learned, absorbed, lived, and breathed. The constant awareness that comes with that is something we internalize to the point where we don't even think about it. Ernie and I never lost that, and even today, we take it home with us. If you come to our house in Ormond Beach, Florida, you'll see standardization everywhere. It's how we might prepare meals, use a *Kanban* system for groceries, and organize our work and living areas. Even our cat knows what our standards are all about, and he has his own as well!

People often ask us, "How could you survive in such a rigid environment?" We answer that acquiring DNA is a little like getting in shape at the gym. It's tough at first, but when you work at it for a while, it becomes part of your daily routine, and soon, you start to enjoy the benefits. Ultimately, DNA makes it possible for everybody to work as a team toward a common True North – a "fitness goal" that is truly worth achieving.