

## THE VALUE OF EVERY SECOND

You can see from what you've read so far that profound respect for standards was a given in our environment. Time was very much the essence here, and this was reflected in TMMK's attendance policy that was in force when we first started

I learned about this the hard way back in the days when I was a new team member. One day, I arrived at my process 30 seconds late. I knew from my new hire orientation about our start and stop times for first shift, and how important it was to be on time, but I had just assumed I would get a pass if it was just a few seconds late.

I was a little surprised, then, when I was asked to meet with my group later that day to discuss how I was going to cover my "lost time." In our discussion, I was reminded that in order to ensure that quality and productivity expectations were met, a team leader had to cover over half my process. Even though my absence was very brief, it was still an absence that triggered a necessary action by my team leader.

I quickly internalized this, as did my fellow team members, and developed the habit of being at my work process on time, fully dressed in my PPE (personal protective equipment). Furthermore, I set my mind to achieving perfect attendance, as there were rewards for that.

Now, when I share this story with people who are unfamiliar with Toyota's culture, many folks jump to the conclusion that TMMK (Toyota) policies are insensitive to people and overly rigid with standards. Many are used to thinking, "Who cares if I'm 30 seconds late? Even if I'm 30 minutes late, it shouldn't make that much difference. I will just make up my time later in the day or come in early the next morning."

The point is, every team member at TMMK plays an essential role in supporting the overall output, and every second counts. Respect for each of those seconds isn't something you can turn on and off when it is convenient – you really have to live up to the expectations they were created from. And as we will see, this is a big part of what we call DNA.

The attendance policy, therefore, was connected with a deeper purpose. The unsaid message here was, "Tracey-san, you are a contributor to our Plastics team, which ensures our Assembly shop internal customer has all their expectations met. We need your contribution so we can set the stage for the external customer to have a smile."

Getting that smile from the external customer depended on individuals in all functional areas within TMMK (Toyota) understanding their role in the “order to customer” value stream. When you truly embrace the meaning and cost translation of a second of time, it’s the pathway to purpose.

As Eiji Toyoda says in the Toyota Way, “People are the most important asset to a company, they are also the determinant of the rise and fall of an organization.” The attendance policy, seen in this light, respects the true value of each and every individual to the organization. And when you consider how deeply TMMK invested in us, there can be no question about its commitment to this way of thinking.

Let’s get back to that 30 seconds for a moment. Remember our journey to get model changes down from several days to several minutes?

Here’s another example. When we started at TMMK, the expectation was that we’d be able to send a new car off the line every 60 seconds. We found this unbelievable – even 65 seconds seemed nearly impossible in those early days – but little did we know that several years down the road, we would see the *takt* standard drop as low as 53 seconds.

This was achieved, literally, one second at a time, and every employee contributed ideas to move us forward. Our trainers taught us that the key to improvement wasn’t trying to hit a home run every time – it was about getting lots of base hits, and finding ways to minimize errors and avoid repeating mistakes. As well, it was about looking for ways to improve every single day. That’s how Toyota achieves its phenomenal results.

One of my first trainers illustrated this point by challenging us to observe and discover one second of waste at our processes. This seemed at first to be a joke to me, but I quickly realized no one was laughing. We Instrument Panel (I/P) team members glanced at each other with a puzzled look, because many of us were thinking, “Is a second really so important that we need to spend our time searching for one?” We felt we could use our time more wisely – what an assumption that was!

Our trainer, sensing our skepticism, said, “Let me explain the importance of one second to this company (TMMK).” So we all gathered around a flipchart out by the process, and he began to jot down a few numbers. He explained that if every team member in the entire plant, not just our I/P team, saved a second of time, the accumulated savings would allow us to produce eight more Camrys in a single shift.

I wondered, “How could this be possible?” But when you accounted for all the variables – number of employees, number of processes, seconds in each cycle, etc. – and did the math, eight Camrys per shift was the correct number.

I don't know the exact impact on profitability, but one can assume that eight cars per shift with no additional investment is going to make a significant difference to the company. And it provides a definitive "yes" to the question, "Could what I do each day be that important to the overall company output?" This message was very empowering, and it helped us internalize just how important our jobs were.

What's exciting here is that TMMK, by placing continuous improvement in the hands of the workforce, was assigning enormous responsibility to each and every worker – essentially, they were entrusting us with the value of those precious seconds, which cumulatively added up to significant benefits for both the company and our customers.

This reinforced our understanding of DNA, and our commitment to "go thinking," a phrase that we used at the time and is now printed on the back of our business cards. And yes, it showed that being 30 seconds late really does make a difference.