

# GEMBA



## DEFINITION

- A Japanese term meaning "the actual, or real place"
- Derived from the Japanese term "gembutsu," or "real thing"
- Also known as "genba" with an "n"

In business operations, Gemba refers to any place where work is happening, where value is being created. For example, in manufacturing, gemba is the factory floor; in the office, it's where support services are provided; in the hospital, it's the operating/exam rooms.

## THE GEMBA WALK

Not the latest exercise app...the Gemba walk is a powerful, core Lean practice focused on bringing leaders at all levels to where the work is happening. The art of "managing while walking around," as Taiichi Ohno first put it, is simple in theory, more challenging in practice.

Leaders as teachers walk the plant/area/office/hospital, guided by a preset checklist. They observe the work first hand, note abnormalities and opportunities, reinforce Lean principles, promote positive culture, and make recommendations for improvement.

## TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL GEMBA WALK

- Prepare: the teams, and a plan/theme for the walk. Don't randomly walk around and create confusion.
- Make Walks Purposeful: keep themes relevant to overall strategy and stay focused on the process during the walk
- Watch: keep a lookout for abnormalities. The walks are learning opportunities for all.
- Ask Questions: listen, observe, allow time for questions, and be prepared to provide suggested options, remembering problem solving and empowerment occur through asking questions.
- Focus on: employee recognition, communication, and setting expectations
- Create Accountability: through the use of lists, accountability boards, and visual controls
- Be Consistent: conduct regular, value-added walks to facilitate learning, and reinforce concepts and commitment to Lean engagement

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## BENEFITS OF GOING TO GEMBA

Stay behind the scenes, closed off from the place where real work occurs? Or, get out there, and help motivate, make change happen?

Below is a snapshot of the key benefits of going to Gemba:

- Gets leaders out into the workplace and learning by observation
- Reinforces leadership engagement and Leader Standard Work
- Focuses on Socratic teaching method: learn by asking questions
- Allows for leadership teaching and reinforcement of lean thinking and practices

## A PERSPECTIVE OF LEADERSHIP AND GEMBA IN HEALTHCARE

Dombrowski & Mielke created a model for an integrated lean leadership system in 2013 which illustrates how Gemba integrates with 4 other principles of lean leadership (improve culture, self-development, qualification, and Hoshin Kanri). In the attached article, the authors apply Dombrowski's and Mielke's model to create a framework for lean leadership in healthcare:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5868554/>

## NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Gumbo, a thick stew or soup, ...say for example the consistency of a machine's lubrication fluids if preventive and predictive maintenance practices are not being adhered to. A possible abnormality that could be uncovered during a manufacturing Gemba walk?

Gumby...can you say Claymation? If not, the relevance of this pre-app era, pliable green dude with permanent bell bottoms and red pony sidekick will sadly be lost on you!

## FAMOUS QUOTE RELATED TO GOING TO GEMBA

*"Many good American companies have respect for individuals, and practice Kaizen and other TPS (Toyota Production System) tools. But what is important is having all of the elements together as a system. It must be practiced every day in a very consistent manner—not in spurts—in a concrete way on the shop floor." - Fujio Cho, President, Toyota Motor Corporation*

## THE POWER OF "WHY" QUOTE

*"Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton was the one who asked why." - Bernard Baruch*

