



# AdamsonPVFSupply

BY JOAN ADAMS

## Lean Techniques For The PVF Warehouse

Recently I took an intensive course at the National Institute of Testing and Standards, (seven days in a row, eight+ hours each day!) to become certified in “Lean Enterprise” techniques.

It was great to be reminded of all the valuable lessons that have come to us from the Toyota Manufacturing miracle. Lean manufacturing has gone far beyond cars and manufacturing – to the point that it is now frequently referred to as Lean Thinking. Moreover, these “Lean” concepts ring true for all businesses.

During my marathon training session, I became reacquainted with the fundamental building blocks in Lean – one of which is the five S’s. The original five S’s came from Toyota – and represent Japanese words. American translators have come up with some pretty good “S” words to do the job as well (see adjacent box).

Japanese 5 S's	Translation	American 5 S's
1. Seiri	organization	Sort
2. Seiton	neatness	Set in Order
3. Seiso	cleanliness	Shine
4. Seiketsu	standardization	Standardization
5. Shetsuko	discipline	Sustain

Here I would like to introduce you to the five S philosophy and show you how to start the five S process in your warehouse. The five S’s are deceptively simple, yet they are quite powerful and can save you time, effort and money.

Before embarking on the Five S’s, first take a look at your warehouse. Walk the floor. Ask yourself the following questions — and be honest! Is everything neat and clean? Are all tools, packing materials, and paperwork in their proper place? Are all the aisles free from material? Are bins and shelves easily identified by tags, colors and labels? Is the receiving dock

*Evaluate what’s needed in an area and, even more important, what’s NOT needed.*

free of all materials except those being received? How about the shipping dock? Do you have a designated area for problem materials (wrong item, broken or damaged shipments, over-shipments)? Has everyone in the warehouse been trained? Do they all know the procedures for receive, put away, pick/pack/stage? (Do you have procedures?)

I bet your answers were something like “no, sort of, not really, some of the time...” and my favorite – “No – but” – as in, “No – but we don’t have the space... No – but everyone knows what’s in the bins... No – but we don’t have much ‘problem’ material.” No more buts – let’s start.

Pick an area to do your first Five S – Let’s take receiving for example.

Define the area. Next, write up a quick list of the activities that occur in receiving, i.e.,

1. Receive vendor deliveries from vendor trucks (stock and non-stock materials).
2. Receive UPS deliveries (stock, non-stock material and supplies).
3. Receive your own company truck pick-ups (from vendors or customer returns).

4. Receive returns.
  5. Receive supplies.
- Now you are ready to start.

### **SORT – “KEEP ONLY WHAT IS NEEDED”**

Ask yourself, what is needed at receiving? Then ask the equally important question – What is not?

It is time to sort through EVERYTHING in the receiving area (then you need to repeat this with all the areas in your warehouse). Keep all things needed for receiving and remove everything else. In Lean, you want to have all the tools and materials that you need right at hand (this is called point of use), with nothing else in the way. In the sort process, you will quickly identify items that obviously don’t belong, but others, you may not be too sure. Get your receivers involved. It’s their workspace – they know which items are rarely used and just take up space.

I have seen receiving areas that were full of all sorts of non-receive-related items – packing tools, extra copies of unrelated paperwork, valves/fittings/bolts just kind of sitting around. Yet, when a delivery truck pulled up – no one could find a pen that worked or stapler that was full! Eventually, a working pen was found under some paperwork and staples were discovered behind some fittings way in the back of a shelf.

### **SET IN ORDER - “A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING AND EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE”**

Identify the best location for all tools, materials, and paperwork in receiving. (You will need to find a place for all that stuff you just removed from receiving, too.) Labels, bins, color-codes are all ways to clearly identify locations and what

## Adams on PVF Supply

belongs there. Lean thinking says workers should be able to find anything that they need to do their job in 30 seconds or less.

Along the same lines, receiving needs to have clearly marked areas (painted lines on the floor work well) for stock and non-stock materials. Designate where the material is going — stock to the warehouse, non-stock to the staging/shipping area.

Receiving areas tend to have a lot of paperwork floating around. Consequently, there's a lot of rooting around looking for the right document. Most receiving areas would definitely fail the 30-second rule. Dedicate an adequate amount of counter space for clearly labeled paperwork trays. Three-week-old paperwork isn't needed in the receiving area, it just clutters up the place. Systematically clear out paperwork every week, or even every day. File it somewhere far away.

### SHINE – “CLEAN EVERYTHING INSIDE AND OUT”

Shine is the most easily overlooked and trivialized “S.” I hear things like, “This is a warehouse – not a hospital,” and “PVF is just not a clean business!” Clean doesn't mean antiseptic. It means a warehouse clear of debris, unnecessary items, and hazards like oil spots and broken pallets. A PVF warehouse should have clear aisles — no skids, boxes, or inventory blocking the way. Trucks and forklifts should have regularly scheduled maintenance. Old pallets, boxes, and other junk need to be cleared out, not shoved off in some corner. Shine addresses the clutter that naturally builds up everywhere, and creates safety hazards.

Skids in the aisles cause delays. They tend to be moved repeatedly from one inappropriate spot to another. I don't have to tell you that moving materials around the warehouse is just a waste of energy.

Time also gets wasted when workers scurry around looking for tape-guns, packing materials, hammers, pens, etc.

“Shine” also addresses the routine maintenance schedules that keep your trucks and forklifts running better and longer.

### STANDARDIZE – “CREATE RULES TO MAINTAIN THE FIRST THREE S's”

Once Sort, Set in Order and Shine are underway and working, you need to make sure they don't become one-time procedures. Standardize is the step where you formalize the first three S's. Create rules, write procedures, and set up cleaning and maintenance schedules. Assign responsibilities for each “S.”

### SUSTAIN – “STICK TO THE RULES, SCRUPULOUSLY”

Sustain is all about making it stick. All workers are trained in the new procedures and the procedures become habit. Sustain is related to a D word – discipline. Make it clear, the five S's aren't a matter of choice. This is how we operate now.

The Five S's are not some Japanese silver bullet. They won't prevent vendor errors, for instance, but they will make it easier to identify those errors, earlier. They won't prevent rush orders, but Five S will make it easier to get rush orders out the door faster. Five S is a very low tech and low cost way to improve your warehouse performance. It makes sense. Who wouldn't be more productive in a clean, orderly environment supplied with everything you need to do your job? <<

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