KAIZEN® Healthcare Tour 2014 – Interview with Christian Walcott

Q: As an experienced lean practitioner, leader, and sensei, what were your key takeaways or new learning from the trip?

One word comes to mind and that is diversity. Diversity of approach, utilization of tools, sustainment and central messages promoted by leadership from site to site. Corporate diversity- differences in how the body of the organizations work and ultimately what they have defined as their vision is as varied as people...and it [lean/kaizen] still works!

Q: What was it like leading a group of physicians and healthcare leaders from around the world?

It was really very pleasant work as some organizations had very specific needs to address, while others had a holistic touring in mind. The conversations were lively and rich with sharing and great story telling that allowed all to learn simultaneously from our tour sites, formal lessons and perhaps most importantly, from each other.

Q: There are many places around the world where people can learn about lean and KAIZEN, what are some of the key reasons for traveling to Japan to see and learn first hand?

Venturing to Japan offers several advantages in that visitors are offered deep exposure to the cultural norms in which lean thinking was born. Each tour site has a story to offer, some dating back decades. Lean and KAIZEN thinking has been in play longer in Japan [business] models than anywhere else. When you’re thirsty, very thirsty-go to the well.

Q: What were your impressions of the hospitals and their KAIZEN efforts?

In truth I was impressed with the levels of pride shown at each healthcare site and in the stories of the touring organizations. While lean in Japan healthcare is far from the norm, and in a pre- saturation stage, the spirit for bringing lean thinking is strong and robust. It is a peek at what the earliest days of Toyota may have been like. Keep in mind that lean healthcare has been active for about 10 years by contrast to 50+ in manufacturing. The tour offered keen examples of this with both manufacturing and healthcare sites to the participants.

Q: Are there any other highlights from the trip that you’ll remember fondly or look forward to repeating in future trips?

Camaraderie of spirit. I personally had a fulfilling trip- going to multiple gembas, discussing and sharing what was offered along with constructively offering guidance to participants for their own sometimes individual and corporate needs. I too had a great time stretching my boundaries with the application of lean tools. The friendly and humorous conversations that wrapped the week of traveling the country, going to gemba, trying unusual foods while making new friends, learning and memories was a complete joy.

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