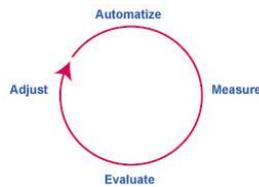


Kaizen Korner



Kaizen: A Japanese word for "change for the better" or "improvement"; the English translation is "continuous incremental improvement" or "continual improvement". In Chinese, Gai Shan means good change for the community; generating benefits for everyone.

Kai = Good Zen = Change: Good Change or Good Way

Automatization! The fourth step in the kaizen cycle.

The human body is a homeostatic machine. It's like a black box which continuously adjusts itself to accommodate changes in its environment. In fact, despite all we know about energy systems, physiology, psychological and mental processes, it's still largely a black box to us.

If you persist with a repetitious movement, your nervous system adjusts by automating it. It does this to free up resources for coping with the next new situation. It does this by growing new pathways and pushing control down the system towards the periphery.

It works best when you don't think about it.

Get in the Zone! When you're in the flow state, performance is effortless! Everybody wants to go there, but no one has a surefire formula. When processes are automatized, you can let your body get on with it, while you just ride along as an observer; you are In the Zone. How do you get there? Repetition.

The human body doesn't seem to have a way to consciously automate activities. You can't show your body how to do something and then say – "OK body, now go away and automate that".

You have to take something that is a novel process and do it over and over, and over. The internal processes of the body react to the repetition by building new connections in your nervous system, reorganizing reflexes and muscle firing patterns, in effect memorizing the physical sequence until the brain can subcontract the activity to the body.

This is a different kind of memorization than memorizing the steps of the process – snow covers; dismount rifle; change magazine; etc. If you like, think of it as a body memory; or an embedded memory.

Physiology works the same way.

When you change your workouts, say from 1 min. intervals to 2 min. intervals, your body reacts by building up the systems needed to accommodate the increased (or different) workload. The conscious input is administering the changed workload. No one knows how to consciously make muscle cells grow more mitochondria, but we can all, consciously, and conscientiously, go out and run/walk/hike/bike, etc. on a schedule that will provoke the body into reacting the way we want it too. Choosing the right provocation is a coaching skill. Going out and doing the workout *properly* is an athletic skill; a skill which is learned by repetition.

Are we there yet?

When the body has adapted its systems to the new stimulus, the workouts begin to feel easy, the drills feel smooth and fast and its time to measure again so that we can analyse the direction and magnitude of change in the overall outcome.