



By **KAY SEVER, CMC, CQIA**  
Sustainable Improvement Consultant & Coach



# COAL, COST and CULTURE

## Management Strategies for Improving Mine Performance

### Awareness – A Double-Edged Sword in Improvement

All change and improvement begins with the moment where we see problems as opportunities – problems with equipment, cost overruns or conflicts between departments. This moment is tied directly to increased awareness - our ability to perceive and react to our surroundings, a condition or an event. Because awareness is a significant catalyst for change, increasing awareness at the management level is worth millions of dollars to every company seeking to improve performance.

**Awareness** (not cash, capital, cost reductions, new equipment purchases, or incentive plans):

- Enables company-wide excellence, unites managers and the workforce, and sustains operations during tough times.
- Helps you use all of your existing production capacity before approving expansion capital.
- Reveals organizational inefficiencies that prevent you from optimizing equipment performance.
- Reminds us that people and behaviors, not machines, ultimately determine our success with improvement.
- Empowers an improvement program to deliver and sustain the expected benefits.

**A lack of awareness:**

- Hides improvement opportunities.
- Reduces your ability to increase performance and change the culture.
- Results in approval of expansion capital when you still have unused production capacity.
- Causes you to budget for the same problems you had last year and maybe add people to manage them.
- Can sabotage an entire improvement program.

So...if awareness is a critical success factor in improvement, where does the double-edged sword come in? The answer to this question involves **expectations of managers and employees**. Improvement programs create expectations for change and “give everyone permission” to fix problems that have been plaguing them for years. Employees on the receiving end of these problems **feel a sense of relief** because they expect these problems to finally be addressed.

Do you remember a problem that originated in another department but affected your area of responsibility? If that department did not take action in your behalf, how much harder did you have to work and how did you feel about the lack of cooperation? Raising awareness about problems reminds us that **only the “owner” of a problem can fix the problem**. If the department responsible for correcting the problem does not cooperate, **other departments affected by the problem feel additional stress**. They know that the problem still exists and that the responsible department is intentionally not taking action in an environment where action to resolve problems is expected.

Management responsiveness greatly influences the culture at every company, and awareness increases the importance of management responsiveness. When managers are proactive and do everything they can to remove barriers to change, they are respected and admired by the workforce. When managers choose to ignore problems only they can fix, the workforce may stop trying to make things better. Employees may believe that management is not committed to change because managers are not behaving like they are committed. This message (unintentionally sent by management) will sabotage improvement efforts throughout the company.

**Are your managers and employees walking by the most important things to fix?** Maybe it's time to focus on awareness to get the most from your improvement program. Any time is a good time to raise awareness of improvement potential. Processes for “raising awareness” 1) improve management responsiveness to problems that extend beyond the boundaries of one department and 2) augment the power of any improvement initiative to meet or exceed improvement expectations.

Here's the thought for April:

All managers have a choice as to how they respond to problems only they can fix. Their choice can energize an improvement program or shut it down. Being aware of the power attached to this choice helps managers make the right choice every time.

Kay Sever is a leader in sustainable improvement for mines and plants. She combines 29 years of mining experience with a common-sense approach to improvement that raises awareness about lost opportunity and hidden barriers that prevent improvement success. She has developed a **NEW Management Training Series** called "**Opportunity Fundamentals – Equipment, Cost and Culture**" to help management teams solve the kinds of problems discussed above and "**manage change like they manage operations**". She also implements improvement programs for mining and downstream processing facilities. Kay works with every organizational level and department to find the highest dollar opportunities and remove barriers that prevent sustainable change. She helps management teams lead improvement and better execute the budget, capital approvals, incentive plans, communications, etc. See [MiningOpportunity.com](http://MiningOpportunity.com) for details on her services and contact information. Look for the mining edition of her first book "**Building An Opportunity Culture – Addressing the Barriers That Steal Profits and Prevent Sustainable Change**", available on her website under Products/Books.