

Observation

During a Gemba Walk, the team involved in the walk will go to the physical location (e.g., the manufacturing or restaurant floor) to observe how processes are carried out. The focus is on understanding the workflow, identifying inefficiencies, and finding areas for improvement by seeing the real-time operations. Avoid disrupting workflow as much as possible. Gemba walks are meant to be carried out during the course of business allowing for in-the-moment observations to be captured. To get a comprehensive view, multiple walks may be necessary to account for different shifts or areas within the facility.

Engagement

The walk is not just observation; it involves actively engaging with employees directly involved in the processes. Approach the walk with a positive attitude. The Gemba walk team asks questions, listens to suggestions, and encourages feedback from employees who often have the best insights into operational challenges to food loss mitigation and opportunities to reduce food waste. Employees feel valued when their input is sought, which can improve morale and promote a culture of collaboration.

Learning

The Gemba walk is about learning, not criticizing. The goal is to gain a better understanding of the challenges front-line workers face when trying to manage food loss and waste in preparation and production environments. Have managers avoid giving immediate directions or solutions. Instead, focus on gathering data and insights to support continuous improvement processes for mitigating food waste. Managers should expect to develop a deeper understanding of day-to-day operations, helping them make more informed decisions.

Focus on Process

A key aspect of Gemba walks is focusing on the process rather than the people. The objective is to improve workflows, identify waste reduction opportunities, and enhance efficiency, not to place blame on employees for existing or articulated problems. By observing processes in real-time—inefficiencies, safety issues, and bottlenecks—food waste issues can be identified, addressed and mitigated.

Problem Solving and Continuous Improvement

After a Gemba walk, managers collaborate with their teams to identify and prioritize improvements. Gemba walks support the principle of continuous improvement by regularly checking in on operations and focusing on incremental improvements.

What is a Gemba walk?

Gemba walks are a management practice used in lean manufacturing and continuous improvement processes to observe, understand, and improve how work is performed on the ground, directly where value is created.

The term “Gemba” is a Japanese word meaning “the real place” or “where the action happens.” In the context of a business, it refers to the actual worksite, such as the production floor, retail store, or any place where the core activities of a company occur.



How often should they be conducted?

Gemba walks should be conducted regularly, with frequency tailored to the needs of the operations, team and improvement goals. We suggest monthly or quarterly to start.