

A Guide to Successful Gemba Walks

WHAT • WHY • HOW

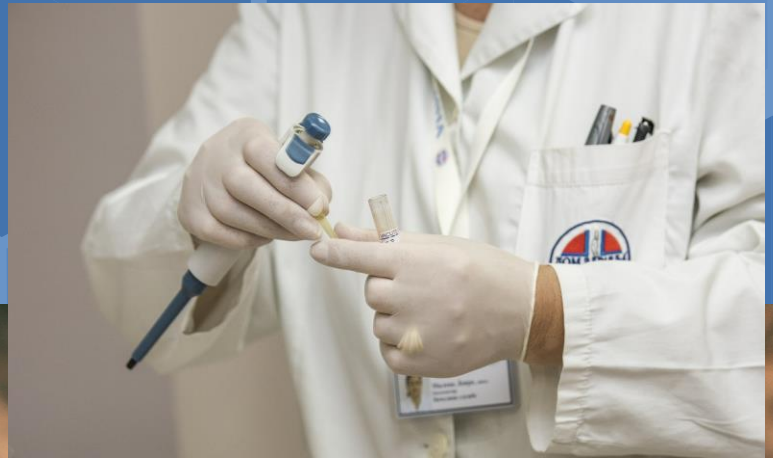
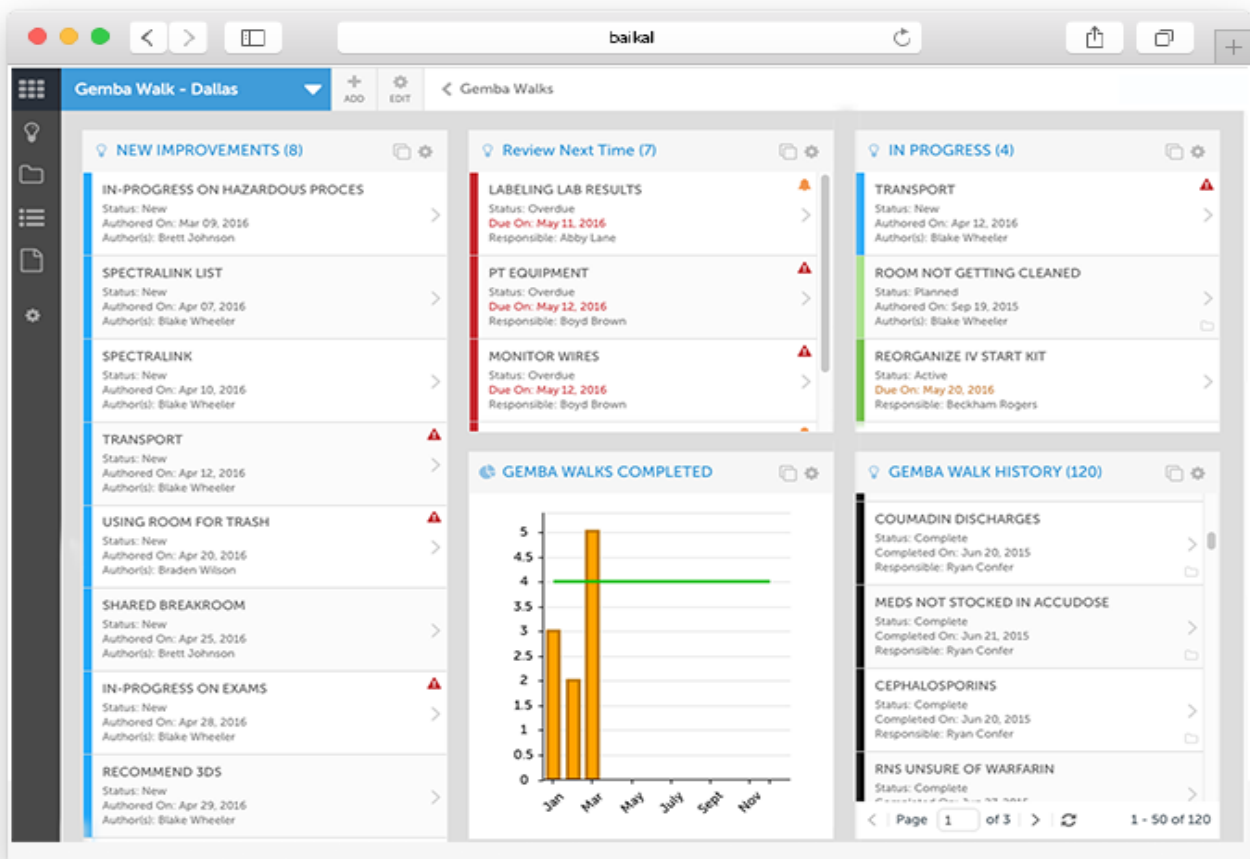


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What's a Gemba Walk?

The term “Gemba” comes from the Japanese word for “the real place.” Taichi Ohno, a Toyota engineer and leader, is often credited with developing the concept of the “Gemba Walk” – the idea that leaders should regularly and frequently be present to observe the work of their organization when and where it takes place.

A Gemba Walk is the practice of observation and collaboration at the place where work is being done.



In a Gemba Walk, leaders visit the work area to glean first-hand knowledge regarding:

- How products are built
- How services are provided
- Current challenges
- Opportunities for improvement



Management by Walking Around is hardly ever effective.

The reason is that someone in management, walking around, has little idea about what questions to ask, and usually does not pause long enough at any spot to get the right answer.

- Dr. W. Edwards Deming
Out of the Crisis, 1982

What's the difference between Gemba Walks and Management By Walking Around?

Different Goals

The goal of a Gemba Walk is to examine the current state of a particular process by observing it in action at the place where it occurs. This aim is narrow, focused, and very specific.

Management by walking around, on the other hand, involves seeing what's going on more broadly (or, done badly, just saying hello and visiting people in the workplace).

Different Destinations

A Gemba Walk takes the leader to a specific place to observe a defined activity.

In MBWA the destination is – by definition – unstructured and undefined, with the leader walking around checking in with employees on equipment and processes at random.



Different Tactics

During a Gemba Walk, the manager asks very in-depth questions about the process being observed, like:

- Who is involved?
- What materials are used?
- What do you do? How do you know what to do?
- When does the task take place?
- What depends on the outcome?

MBWA does not involve that degree of depth, and usually lacks the critical element of a focus on asking open ended questions.

Different Outcomes

Managers visit the Gemba to ask questions rather than to give answers, which helps them identify varied opportunities for improvement.

For all but the smallest “Just Do Its,” a period of subsequent reflection and analysis occurs before any action is taken. This provides the opportunity for a fully formed “Plan, Do, Check, Adjust” cycle.

Leaders, when practicing MBWA, might think they are being helpful by throwing solutions at people. However, these changes are often half-baked and can be more disruptive than helpful.

Why Gemba Walk?

With a thoughtful and structured approach, Gemba Walks can improve communication and collaboration between staff and leaders. This results in the identification of opportunities for improvement that may otherwise be missed.

There's a big difference between discussing processes and problems in a conference room and going out into the "field" to see how the work is done.

That first-hand knowledge is important for leaders to understand current processes and to coach staff to make improvements. Employees also are more likely and able to describe inefficiencies, safety hazards, and other concerns when they are in their own workspace.

Leaders who are committed to continuous improvement often spend 45-60 minutes (or more) a week on formal Gemba Walks.



“Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're 1,000 miles away from a cornfield.”

-President Dwight D. Eisenhower

Top 5 Reasons to Gemba Walk:

1. There is often a gap between how processes look on paper and how they are executed in real life. In some cases, the documentation needs to be addressed. In others the work process needs to be brought in line with the standard work. Direct observation is often the best way to tell the difference.
2. Visiting the workplace is an effective way to communicate both the value of the work being done and the importance of continuous improvement.
3. People are often more open to providing feedback and explaining the reasons for their behavior when they are in their own space. There, it's also easier for them to describe exactly what they do and to demonstrate why.
4. Opportunities for improvement are about systems and process issues, not people. Being present in the space is the best way to spot these opportunities.
5. Frontline workers may be so used to their process or problems that they no longer recognize them as problems. A fresh set of eyes is extremely valuable.



Keys to Successful Gemba Walks

Focus on the Process:

The focus of a Gemba Walk should be on problems in the processes, rather than blaming with the people performing the process. If you see a problem, identify the process failure that allows it to exist, rather than looking for the person responsible.

Observe and Learn:

Keep an open mind and ask lots of open-ended questions. You're on the front lines to learn from the experts, not to judge or give unwarranted advice.

Mix It Up:

Go at different times and days to get a complete picture. Random visits will prevent preparation, so that you can see the true process instead of what people want you to see.

Test Assumptions:

Don't make any guesses about what people are doing or why. A sloppy process might be a workaround to compensate for missing equipment – you don't know until you ask!

Walk with a Cross-Functional Team:

Each person brings a unique perspective to the Gemba Walk, and is likely to identify different opportunities for improvement or have unique ideas for improvement.

GOAL:

The ultimate goal of leaders in improvement cultures should be to build trust and establish a culture in which people feel safe speaking up.

This allows them to improve openly without fear of repercussions, and to prevent future errors.



It's important that all employees understand the purpose of the Gemba Walk - that the ultimate goal is to improve conditions, processes, and instructions for all employees.

The Gemba Walk should always be seen as positive, not punitive.

Don't Adjust the Process or Correct Employees During the Walk:

The purpose of the walk is simply to understand the current state - the good, the bad, and the opportunities for improvement.

Improvement happens later, following analysis and reflection.

Don't Rely on the Manual:

A Gemba Walk is the time to observe what is actually happening, not what has been documented as the policy or standard.

The result of the walk may very well be changes to documented procedures, or realizing another problem such as a training deficit that creates deviations from the standard.

What To Do After a Gemba Walk

Preparation for, and thoughtful execution of, the Gemba walk is important, but the significance of what happens next can't be overstated. The Gemba Walk is simply the first step on your improvement journey.

First, do a post-Walk reflection.

The purpose of a Gemba Walk is to get close enough to the work and ask enough questions that you are able to identify potential areas for improvement. Rather than sharing these ideas during the walk, leaders should reserve them for discussion after a period of careful reflection and review.

Some good questions to ask during this phase of review are:

1. Is standard work being adhered to?
2. Is the workspace appropriate and stocked properly for the job that's being done?
3. Were any of the seven wastes observed?
4. Are employees engaged?
5. Did employees mention or demonstrate any frustrations with processes?
6. Does every step add some sort of value?

Then follow up with post-Walk action:

Successful companies understand that, like with all other business processes, improvement work must have a defined methodology of its own in order to spread and sustain.

Keep reading to see how improvement software can help.

The phase of reflection is natural for most people, but sadly it's as far as many Gemba Walkers get. Ideas for improvement are written on note pads or shared in email, but never acted upon.

What sets successful Gemba Walkers apart is their use of continuous improvement technology to document and act on opportunities for improvement.

Continuous improvement software provides structure and transparency with automated workflows, alerts, and built-in collaboration functionality to enable post-Walk action.



The Role of Software in Supporting Gemba Walks

Continuous improvement software is used by leading companies seeking to accelerate their rate of improvement, engage their employees, and drive a greater impact.

With features that improve communication, increase transparency, and enable data-driven decision-making, KaiNexus helps these organizations to unite and rally their staff around improvement.

KaiNexus supports Gemba Walks with features that:

1. Capture opportunities for improvement in real-time
2. Increase the percentage of opportunities that actually result in improvement
3. Measure the impact of Gemba Walks, as well as the engagement of staff and leaders
4. Share the knowledge gained from each Gemba Walk

Capture Opportunities for Improvement

1.

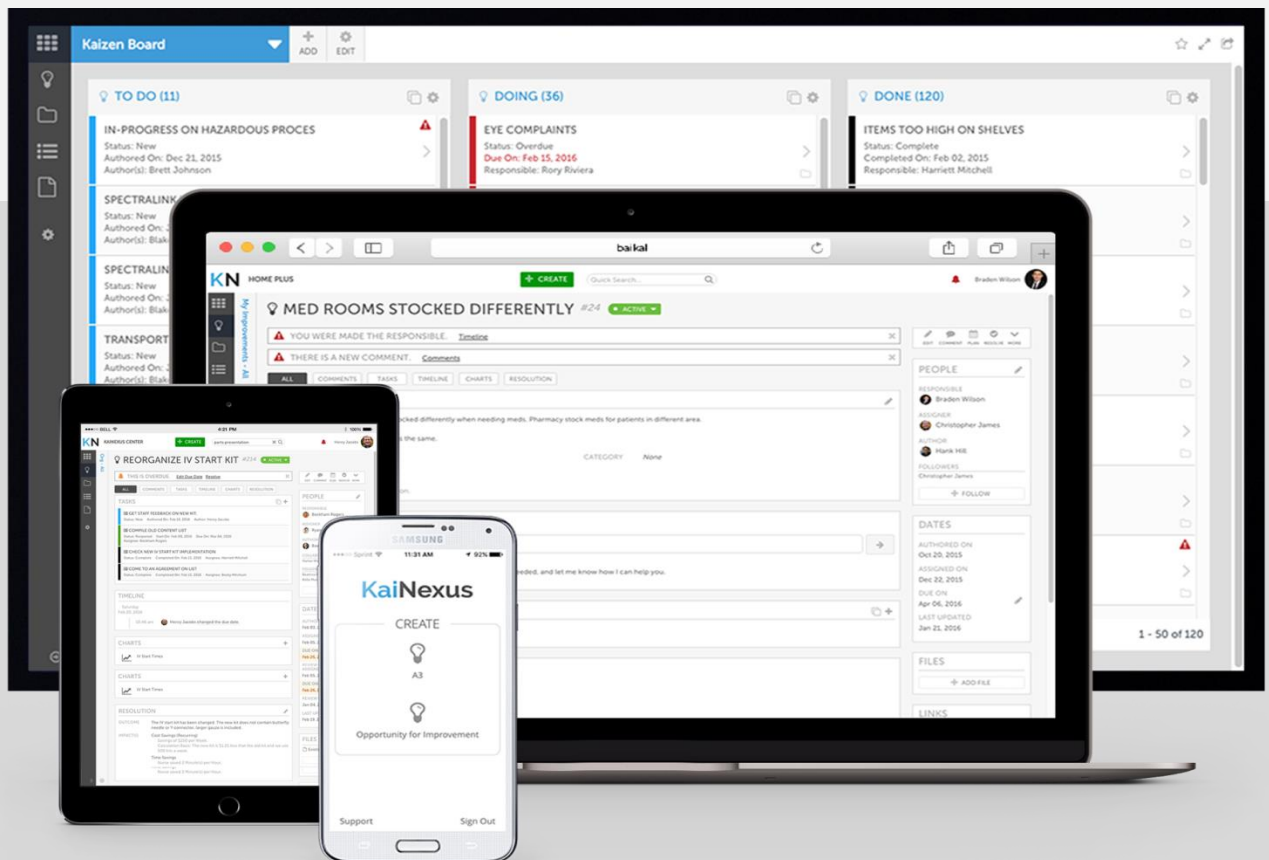
When you're out in the Gemba, you want to capture potential opportunities for improvement in real-time. KaiNexus enables you to submit those opportunities right from your phone or tablet so that you can snap a picture and assign the improvement without missing a beat.

2.

View all of the improvements you capture on any screen using customizable dashboards that make it easy to keep track of progress and key metrics.

3.

Jotting down all improvements in the same platform you're going to use to implement them means that you don't have sticky notes to lose or notepads to forget about. Ensure that nothing falls through the cracks and follow up more efficiently.

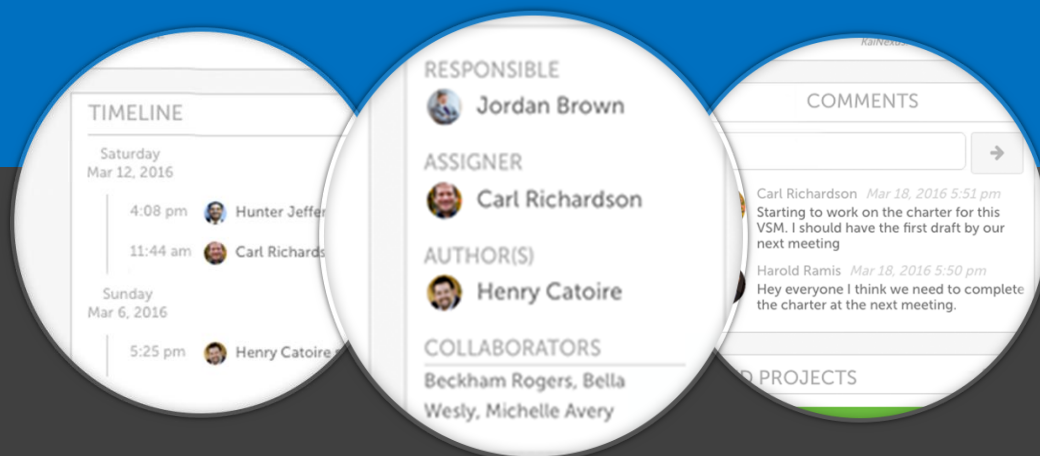


Implement Captured Improvements

1. While the presence of leadership in the Gemba helps both staff and leaders identify opportunities to improve the work, managers cannot (and should not) implement all of these improvements themselves. KaiNexus empowers them to engage staff in implementing improvements so that they can focus on coaching.
2. Once each Gemba Walk is completed, build a team around each improvement. Your team can work together from anywhere using KaiNexus to manage communication and data to evaluate and implement their improvements.
3. Once you've left the Gemba, KaiNexus makes it easy to follow up with employees with any additional questions you may come up with. Streamline communication by putting it all in one spot, and keep everyone in the loop with smart notifications.

From the Front Line:

“Asking for ideas for improvement and failing to implement them is worse than never having asked at all. It shows employees that you don't care about their ideas. At least before you asked, they could give you the benefit of the doubt.”



Measure Engagement and Impact

1.

Measure the ROI of your Gemba Walks with KaiNexus' simple, automated impact reports. Drill down into the details to understand the impact for individual leaders and specific Gemba Walks, or get an overview of your entire Gemba Walk initiative.

2.

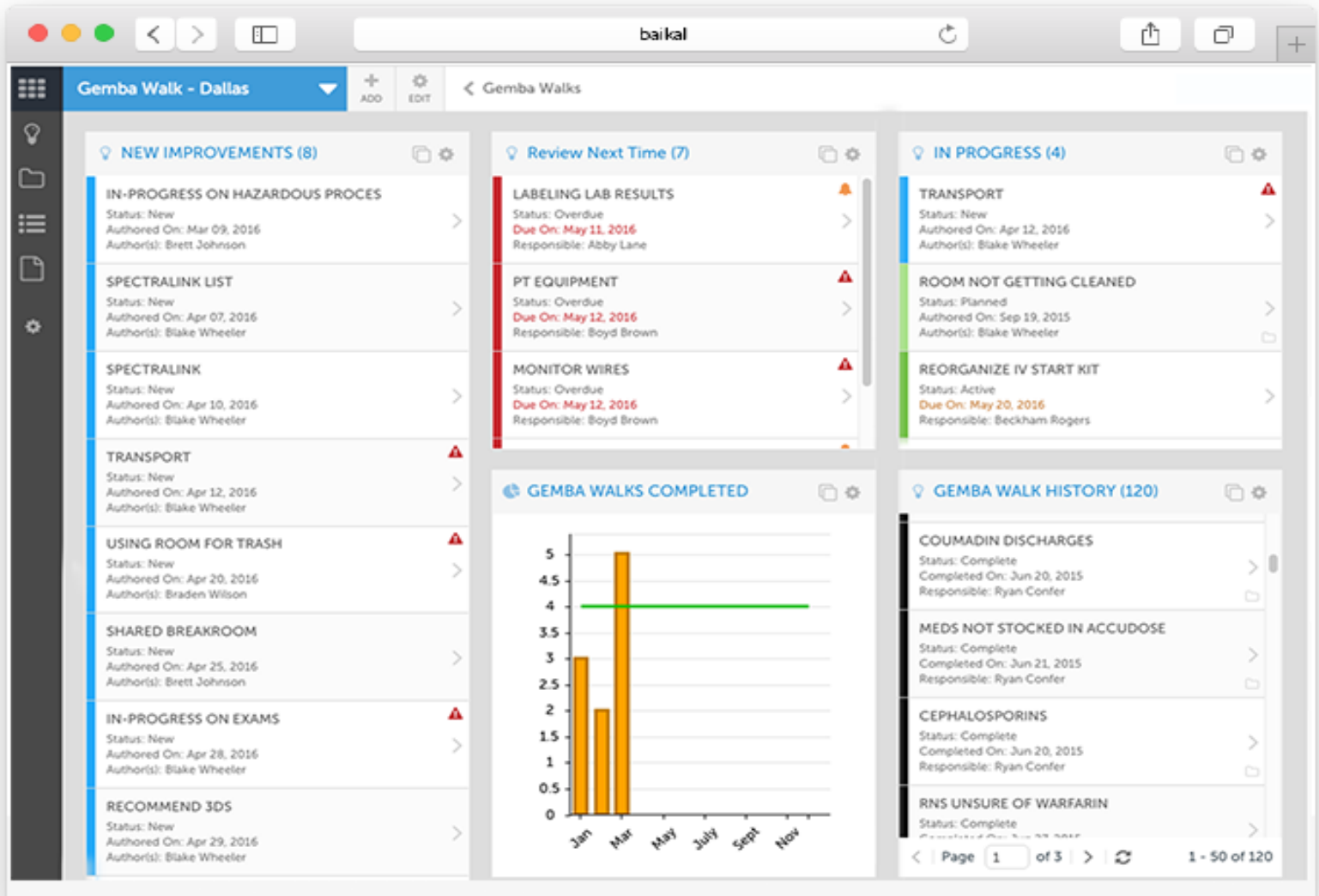
Know who is going on Gemba Walks, whose Walks are effective, and who needs additional coaching with KaiNexus' engagement reports. Increase visibility and accountability to get your entire leadership team on the same page.

3.

Getting a clear picture of the frequency and impact of your Gemba Walks will help you to improve your process for greater results.

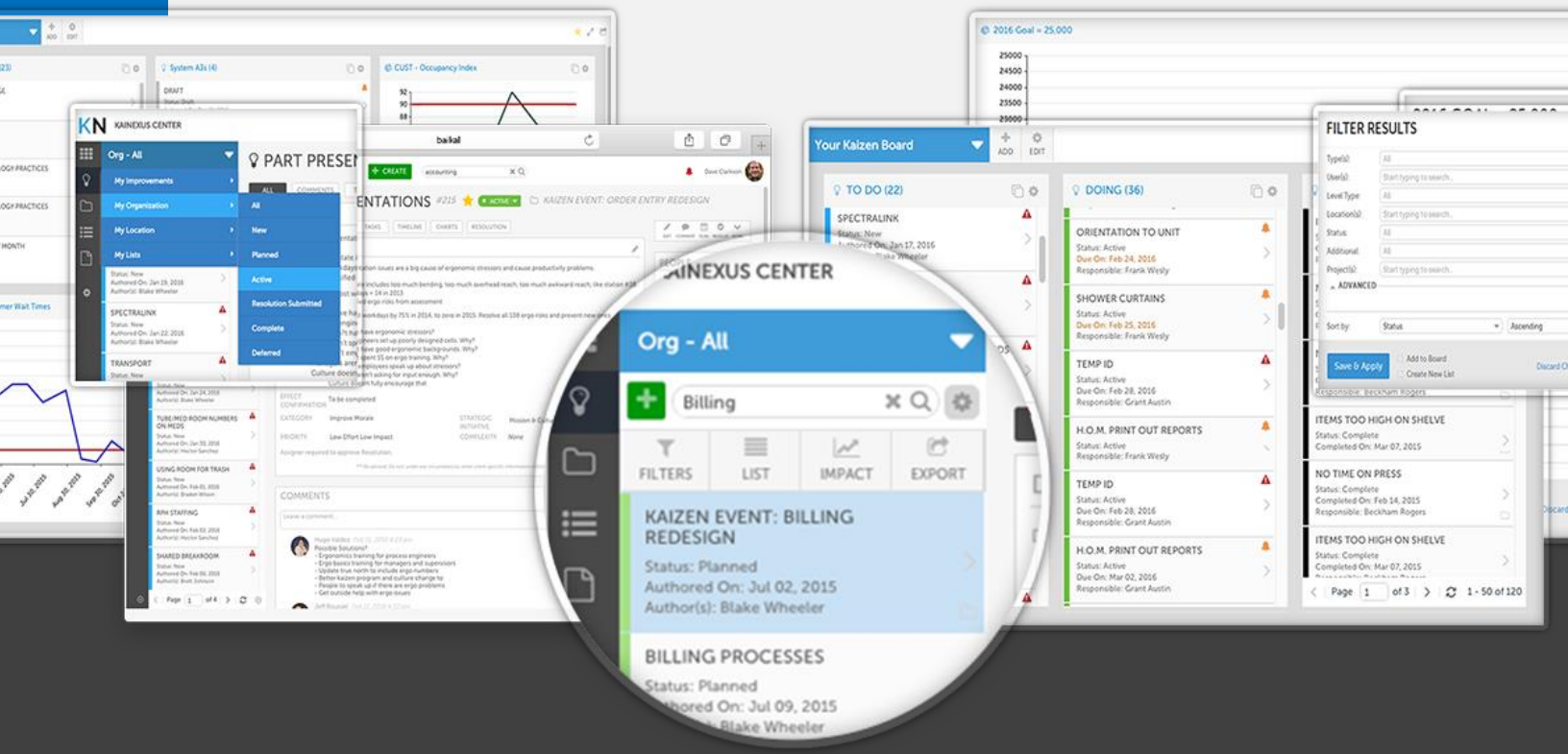
4.

Use digital dashboards to keep track of key metrics and make them accessible to all the right people, wherever they are, without waiting for meetings.



Share Improvements

1. Ensure that each Gemba Walk has the maximum impact by sharing the improvements made as a result of each one. Give everyone in your organization the opportunity to learn from each other.
2. Search for specific areas of improvement, or browse the Gemba Walks of other leaders. KaiNexus creates an institutional knowledge base that makes it easy to find the information you need, so that you can talk about it on your next Gemba Walk.
3. Create a permanent record of your Gemba Walks and the improvements that come from them.
4. Give everyone visibility into the status and impact of their improvements to encourage support and engagement.



KaiNexus

www.kainexus.com

KaiNexus empowers leading organizations in every industry to start, spread and sustain their improvement cultures.

Wherever you are in your improvement journey, KaiNexus will help you take it to the next level with unprecedented visibility, communication and standardization.

See it in Action

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