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## So what is Continuous Improvement (CI)?

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If you are asking this question - you probably do not have it.

If you have it - it will change your business for the better forever.

CI is a way of ensuring that your business is continuously improving, without you having to do all the work yourself. It is a way by which you raise the bar for all your employees, your business and all your business partners. It is both extremely powerful and not so easy to achieve. It is a culture.

The theory behind CI is quite logical - historically businesses had a single person right at the top or a small group of managers that determine the strategy and the way that the strategy will be achieved. They review and approve everything in the organization. That was the old way... The world is significantly different today and today flexibility and innovation are almost synonymous with business sustainability. Along with globalization came increased competitiveness and in today's economic circumstances one of the biggest pressures most businesses face, is financial pressure - pressure on reducing both costs and prices. The downfall of many businesses lies in their attempt to address these pressures with strategies that proved successful in the past...in an environment that today no longer exists. Today many hands really do make light work. Imagine if instead of just 1 or 5 people working on propelling this business forward in the right direction, you could have 100 or 300? Imagine if all the employees of an entire business had the necessary access to information, knowledge and skills to identify opportunities for improvement and make the best decisions for the overall business every single day?

We can tell you from our own practical experience that no matter how improbable this may sound, that it is indeed possible!

The main aim of CI is happy team members and improved business results and these two things have been proven to be inter linked.

How does it work?

- You need unwavering commitment to the end result, no matter what it takes and it is almost guaranteed to take more than what you think when you start out on the CI journey - it's not a project, but a culture change
- You need to subscribe to trial and error - accept that the goal is fixed, but the means are not
- Ask and listen! Transparency is key - information sharing on any and every subject, both up and down the business' hierarchy, must become at the order of the day
- Set the example, practice what you preach and take extreme caution to not reward unacceptable behaviour - even leaving unacceptable behaviour unaddressed can be a mistake
- Be sincere - if you do not really care about the people and believe in their potential, they will sense it and it will not work
- Trust - remember that trust does not come guaranteed with your job title, it must be earned over time and it is based on consistency of behaviour
- Start out with volunteers and work with volunteers as much as possible, but provide sufficient opportunities for anyone and everyone to participate



- Appeal to the entire individual - mind, heart and body
- Recognition is very important
- Add positivity and fun! ☺

Once the right environment has been created, the people in it has been "switched on", equipped with the necessary skills, efficient mechanisms to share information has been established and an effective framework within which people have the authority to implement improvements by themselves are in place, you will start to see amazing positive energy gaining momentum and people will be contributing to business improvements actively, continuously and throughout the entire business.

We have to add a note of caution though; although the results gained from CI exceeds our expectations every single time, it is a complex thing to get just right - so we recommend that you get support and guidance from a CI expert to facilitate this process. Especially in the beginning it is incredibly valuable to get an objective third party involved with whom neither senior nor junior employees have any history with.

The investment of your time and effort will be no doubt worth it - guaranteed!

*Our Continuous Improvement and Supply Chain experts are assisting businesses in and around Cape Town to Continuously Improve and Adapt To Change. With more than 40 years practical experience – we know how to reduce your costs and make your business better!*

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