



## Part 3

# Organizing spaces with 5S

The 5S methodology for storage and arrangement makes waste reduction far easier

BY BILL GOLOSKI

**M**ANY NURSERIES DEPLOYING LEAN to make their processes less wasteful have found that organizing work spaces is a crucial part of their approach.

To do this, they are deploying a Lean methodology called “5S.” The letters stand for 1) sort, 2) set in order, 3) shine, 4) standardize and 5) sustain.

The ultimate goal of 5S is to create a clean and orderly work environment with a very clear purpose. Each item gets a specific location, except the items that are not needed — those are removed.

“5S is about creating a culture of respect,” Elizabeth Peters, Lean consultant with **The Peters Company**, said. “When we have a clean, safe, orderly and visual workplace, we have improved employee morale, less searching for what’s needed, and better productivity.”

To get started, production teams look at workspaces and try to see ways the current arrangement of items interfere with production processes. Here are some simple questions to get the process going:

### 1. Sort: What can be done to eliminate workplace clutter?

A business will move closer to waste reduction and improved production through efficient workspaces, not overcrowded ones. That means sorting all items in the space and removing what’s not needed.

Clutter can hide right in plain sight — especially if in a space that feels very familiar. That’s why Josh Zielinski, an owner of **Alpha Nursery Inc.** in Salem, Oregon, brought together people from different areas of the business to work on the 5S process at the nursery.

“It’s funny because people who work in the area all the time don’t even notice the stuff they didn’t use,” he said. “When you put someone in there with a fresh set of eyes, and they ask, ‘Do you guys ever use this?’”

Many times, stuff was just there because it was always there.

### 2. Set in order: What can we change in organizing our spaces?

Set in order requires placing items in the place where they are most needed and best used to fulfill their function in the process.

At **Smith Gardens** in Aurora, Oregon, continuous improvement coach Tom Ingram is working with the shipping team to revamp the staging area to keep the reigns tight on the carts. The problem was that a selection team could be tasked to load a cart with an order, but the next moves of that cart became another team’s responsibility.

“It was hit-or-miss or relying on the word-of-mouth of where stuff should be done — which could vary season to season or every other time you walk in there,” Ingram said.

It wasn’t unusual for carts to make quite an unusual trip around the operation.

Smith Gardens put tape marks on the floor to identify cart aisles, encouraging workers to move products along in a sequence. The transplanting teams, the moving teams, and the selection teams all worked together to determine the flow.

The change improved safety as well, as the marks in the corridors separated walking traffic from the movement of equipment.

“We have a nice clear buffer between everyone,” he said.

### 3. Shine: What can we change with our cleaning processes?

A clean workspace demonstrates a company takes pride in the work done.

At **Eshraghi Nursery** (Hillsboro, Oregon), staff started polishing surfaces and painting corners of a wall that hadn’t seen daylight in years, it looked so good that they decided never to

## Lean: Organizing spaces with 5S



leave a worksite unclean.

“Encouraging everybody to take time to better the workspace is a speed bump that all successful companies need to overcome,” farm manager Chris Lee said. “A clean work zone is not an item to invoice. But, the time savings and employee contentment of maintaining cleaner environments must be considered value added.”

**Robinson Nursery** (McMinnville, Oregon) took cleaning to a level of renovation. An old, six-stall horse barn on the property was given new life as a storage facility that they arranged using 5S principles.

The walls and doors to the stalls were removed and four inches of new ground leveled the floor. Sturdy shelves were added to a few sections to group like materials and tools. Existing irrigation equipment was culled through, chemicals and fertilizers were assessed and placed in labeled space, and other nursery needs were arranged where space was available. A previously muddy barn evolved into a new, wide open area that adds storage solutions with a modest level of upkeep.

**4. Standardize:** What cleaning, sorting and ordering steps should we standardize?

Reinforcing these steps will encourage clean and ordered workspaces. One method is to create a visual control system that someone with an untrained eye can immediately understand.

For equipment, shadow boards are a common practice. They can be created by drawing the outline of a tool in the location where it's stored (often, a pegboard). This way, it's easy to see what's missing and where



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Previous page: Left: Robinson Nursery renovated a horse barn for storage. PHOTO BY BILL GOLOSKI Right: Shadow boards hold brooms at Smith Gardens. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PETERS COMPANY

things should go.

One of the biggest improvements at Alpha Nurseries happened in one of smaller spaces of nursery: the chemical room where herbicides, pesticides and fungicides were stored.

The room was disorganized — nozzles, safety equipment, and masks were all around collecting dust — and only the people routinely in the room knew where important products were located. Now, it's all well-organized. Chemicals are separated into different categories, clearly labeled, and has a designated place. "So, when we had hired a new applicator, and it was really easy to explain to him where everything was," Zielinski said.

**5. Sustain:** What will we do to keep the new system going?

Experts suggest adopting a checks and balances system. Many nurseries are requiring employees to do their own checklist audits every week, or even twice a week.

At Robinson Nursery, the audits are performed by everyone from entry-level to old hat, which keeps everyone informed of each area's function.

"I think Smith Gardens excels at trying to make the 5S process it simple for the team to use," Ingram said. "Their audit sheet is just a one-page, bilingual document that you can go through and check the levels to see how well you've scored in this area. It's probably the simplest, most elegant implementation of a 5S audit in all the places that I've worked."

The idea of internal assessment engages employees and empowers them to take ownership of their positions. Incentives aren't always necessary, but they can help promote a friendly, competitive mood to the workplace culture.

Robinson Nursery uses auditing sheets as well, where areas are scored on a numeric scale. At the end of the season, the scores are calculated and a "Lean Champion" is recognized with a bold, branded, bedazzled championship belt that earns the winner endless bragging rights.

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