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NDCS seeks efficiency with inaugural Kaizen event, can-do attitude

By Drew Nystrom

LINCOLN, Neb. – The Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, in association with the Nebraska Department of Administrative Services Center for Operational Excellence, brought together subject-matter experts from across the agency, March 15-17, to conduct NDCS’s first continuous process improvement, or Kaizen, event at the NDCS Central Office in Lincoln, Nebraska.

The purpose of the pilot-project was to create the most efficient workflow process possible using the Inmate Special Order process as a test case and existing process stakeholders as analysts.



Erinn Criner, Nebraska Department of Correctional Services human resources administrator and continuous process improvement facilitator, briefs fellow NDCS staff members on the methodology of and results derived from the inaugural Kaizen event at the NDCS Central Office March 18, 2016 in Lincoln, Neb. (State of Nebraska Photo by Drew Nystrom)

Kaizen is a continuous process improvement practice introduced to Western organizations by renowned Japanese businessman Masaaki Imai in his 1986 book ‘Kaizen: The Key to Japan’s Competitive Success.’

“Deliberate process improvement events like this will allow NDCS to think about the different ways we can use tools, technology, equipment and our people to improve operations,” Scott Frakes, NDCS director, said. “Like any other organization, we should constantly strive to give

value to our customers and improve inefficiencies. This initial event signifies a shift in our thinking and our culture as to how to provide the most value to taxpayers," Frakes said.

Erinn Criner, NDCS human resources administrator and Kaizen facilitator, believes events like this can be a game-changer for the agency.

"What I love about this methodology is that it empowers employees to evaluate their work and come up with a better way," Criner said. "It changes teams. It engages people. By empowering the subject matter experts we create an engaging culture of change," she added.

The NDCS teammates assembled to lend their expertise to event lauded the effort and praised it as time well spent. Participants included Bruce Hunzeker, Nicole Bayne and Kathy Eurich from Central Office; Mike Gabriel from Omaha Correctional Center; Melissa Campbell from Tecumseh State Correctional Institution and; Caleb Larsen from the Nebraska State Penitentiary.

"I had no idea there were so many steps associated with getting and inmate their needs," Eurich said. "I see now, that I am just one step in a much larger process."

Central Office's Bayne commended the inaugural affair.

"It gives me hope for change," Bayne said.

Because continuous process improvement is centered on processes rather than tasks alone, every NDCS teammate has a stake in it," Frakes said. "I want each and every staff member to feel a sense of empowerment since no process is immune from this critical review" he said.

Criner indicated events like these will become more commonplace in the near future. Additionally, reports detailing the effects, positive or negative, of any process changes will be available at 30, 60, and 90 days out from the changes.

"As an agency, we are doing a tremendous amount of work each and every day already," Criner said. "It's important though, we take the time to examine our agency, ourselves, and our processes to seek improvements where they make sense. In the end, our staff, the inmates and citizens of Nebraska will all reap the benefits.