

Alcatraz Tour – Lean 5S?

While in San Francisco a few months ago, I took a long awaited tour of Alcatraz. The tour involved walking through B, C and D [Isolation] Cell Blocks and hearing stories about escape attempts, inmate



fighting and how the prison was home to society's "most horrendous criminals." In addition, inmate names such as: Creepy, Scarface and Birdman did not help the prisoner stereotype where self-discipline and order were far from mind. Imagine the surprise when the tour ended in the kitchen area where a utensil *shadow board* was in place, a 5S System clearly at work!

The inmates were required to use 5S, a series of activities (i.e., sort, straighten, shine, standardize and sustain) to earn privileges beyond shelter, food, clothes and medical attention. If the prisoners wanted to remain in good standing, they learned to sort, straighten, shine, standardize and sustain as a way of life. Like 5S did for the Japanese, this new approach created pride in the prisoners as they became part of something that mattered.

It is well chronicled that this system of self-discipline "stuck" with many of the prisoners as they re-entered free society where uncontrolled responses to entropy can be the trigger of the day!