

Business Essentials: Power of Visuals

Communicate effectively by using visual imagery to convey ideas

by Tom Dzialo

"A picture is worth a thousand words." How many times have you heard that cliché? But there is a lot of wisdom there. Think about all the ways that strong images or icons affect you in your daily life. Imagine how much effort it would take to stop and read signs if those images didn't exist. You know that certain parking places are reserved for people with handicaps based on a unique image, not a wordy sign. Color coding of files and labels allows you to easily locate certain categories of information. Emergency information is often illustrated with easy-to-understand drawings, because in a crisis situation, they need to communicate as clearly and quickly as possible. Images allow you to do that.

This point was really driven home for me a few weeks ago when I was returning from a business trip to California. I was taking a few moments to review the safety instruction card from the seat pocket in front of me. I come from a safety training background, so it comes naturally to me to familiarize myself with safety procedures wherever I go, even though I notice that many people don't. The few moments it takes (in any situation) can pay off in the long run! On that card, I noticed that all the procedures are clearly outlined using pictures. Imagine how ineffective that piece would be if the instructions were all written out in text! For one thing, it would take much longer to read and

review. It would also have to be written out in several languages to accommodate many different travelers — and it would be just about impossible to cover them all. And besides, there is no way that written explanations would be as effective as a few simple, clear instructional drawings.

Think about how visuals can be used in your workplace to create a more efficient environment. One of the best ways is to create a system that visually marks the proper location for tools, manuals, parts — whatever you need on a daily basis. Color-coded labels and shadow outlines guide you quickly to what you need and show you when something is missing. This is the kind of organization that you often use in your home without even stopping to think about it. Consider that little tray you use in the kitchen to organize knives, forks, and spoons. You know where they belong, you know where to look for them, you know where to put them when you are finished cleaning them, and you know when they are missing! Organization like this really is the key to avoiding wasted time and motion.

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**Strong visuals can communicate
much more efficiently
than wordy signs.**



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The Toyota Production System (TPS) has given us a great tool for creating this kind of efficient work environment. It is called "5-S or Workplace Organization," and we will cover it in detail in an upcoming newsletter.

Charts and graphs are another way to communicate ideas quickly and clearly. If your department has a goal for sales, production, or anything else measurable (and goals should *always* be measurable), display a graph showing your progress. A glance at the chart will tell you where you are and how much effort it is going to take to get you to the goal. Isn't that more efficient than a text memo update?



Any question about what message this label conveys? The symbolism works in any language.

Take a look at the images on this page. What do they mean to you? It's reasonable to assume that, as universal symbols, they mean the same thing to a lot of people. That is efficient communication!

If you'd like more information about making your operation run smoothly with visual communications, contact us at Sixth Floor Consulting Group. We'd be happy to help! ■



Pictures are the most effective way of communicating emergency instructions like these.



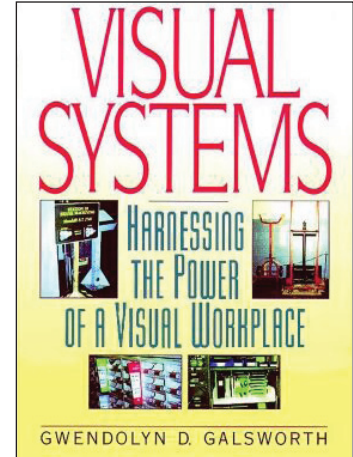
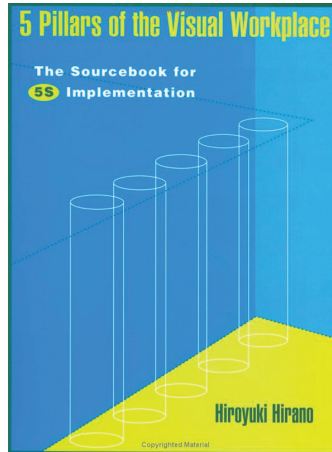
The chart above indicates IBM's stock price over the last couple of months. The message is pretty clear, even without words!



When good visual management tools are in place, a shop floor can practically run itself! It's true. The people assigned to run a floor need two things: information and accountability. When they are given the information they need to organize their jobs and are made accountable for their results, the shop floor can make a leap in productivity.

That way, managers can spend their time working on the business, not *in* the business. That is, the people at the top can get off the shop floor (solving persistent problems, telling people what to do, generally putting out fires) and move on to growing the business. Good Lean shops use visual management to help them accomplish this.

For more information, we recommend two books: *5 Pillars of the Visual Workplace* (by Hiroyuki Hirano) and *Visual Systems: Harnessing the Power of a Visual Workplace* (by Gwendolyn D. Galsworth)



Look at the two photos below. See how the simple addition of diagonal stripes (with tape) creates an effective tool for spotting when a binder is missing or out of place. This is a basic tenet of visual management: make it easy for *everyone* to see how to do something correctly.



The goal of Sixth Floor Consulting Group is to create best-in-class processes, allowing each of our clients to take their businesses to a higher level of quality, profitability, and Lean operation.

Contact us today to put us to work on your team.





No matter which images convey the meaning of the season to you, all of us at Sixth Floor Consulting wish you a joyful and peaceful holiday season! We look forward to working with you next year.

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