

Exceptions Create Chaos, — Standards Create Clarity —

BY ZACK ESTES

Start Small, Start Now

Let's not overcomplicate this.

The biggest reason your jobs go sideways isn't the economy.

It's not the weather. It's not your crew. It's that *everything is an exception*.

Every job starts with a phone call. Every delivery requires a workaround. Every crew lead has "their own way" of doing things.

And every time someone takes a shortcut, forgets a step, or has to stop and ask, it costs you—time, money, and (maybe most frustratingly) momentum.

If there are no standards, everything becomes an exception.

And when everything is an exception, you're not running a business. You're just putting out fires.

No rhythm. No repeatability. No room to grow.

And maybe you're saying: "We don't have time to build processes."

But here's the truth: that chaos you're drowning in is the cost of not building them.

Fires come from *complexity* and *inconsistency*.

You don't need fancy tech. You don't need six weeks off the job to "map your SOPs." You just need to start.

Start with one thing that bugs you. And fix it.

That's the heart of lean thinking. That's what Paul Akers calls the "[2 Second Lean](#)" mindset.

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The Right Tool for the Job

You need the right tool for the job.

If your team's running gas line, you don't hand your crew a rock and say, "Just make it work."

So why are we still trying to build standards using buried PDFs, Google Docs, or worse—our memory?

Standards don't just need to exist. They need to be easy to *create*, easy to *improve*, and easy to *access*.

That's the only way your team will actually use them.

Because if it's buried in some cloud folder—it's not a standard. It's a liability.

This is where [GembaDocs](#) shines.

Whether it's a simple task like making coffee in the breakroom in the office, or a field job like edge drain installation, GembaDocs helps you turn work into clear, visual, no-BS instructions your team can actually follow.

No fluff. No friction. Just clarity.

And because it's so easy to update, your pro-

cesses can improve with your people—without starting over every time something changes.

Real-World Examples Using GembaDocs

To prove how simple and powerful standardization can be, here are two real-world examples from teams using GembaDocs.

Let's start with this example: ["Make Coffee With a K-Cup."](#)

Yes, seriously. There's a process for this.

The team at Great Divide Earthworks put this together.

Why? Because even small things cause friction.

"How you do one thing is how you do everything."

Without a standard, someone forgets to refill the water, leaves a mess, or doesn't know how to use the machine.

Multiply that by 20 small moments like this each day, and you've got a frustrated team and a cluttered culture.

Now imagine what happens when you apply this clarity to something that actually drives revenue, like this example: ["Edge Drain Along a Roadway."](#)

“You don’t have to sit in a conference room with sticky notes to start standardizing. You just need a few minutes, a committed team, and a trash bag.”

This one breaks down everything—crew setup, equipment needed, trench depth, fabric installation, connection to catch basins, stone fill, wrapping—step by step.

Not abstract. Not over-explained. Just clear.

Everyone knows what needs to be done, who’s doing it, and how to execute to spec.

This is what [GembaDocs](#) does best. It turns real-world work into visual, accessible standards that people actually follow.

But how do you create standards?

You don’t have to sit in a conference room with sticky notes to start standardizing. You just need a few minutes, a committed team, and a trash bag.

Enter: 3S.

3S is a process we’ve stolen from lean manufacturing. It stands for:

1. **Sort:** Remove what doesn’t belong.
2. **Sweep:** Clean and fix what’s broken.
3. **Standardize:** Set the standard, or lock in the improvements.

You can use 3S on a place or a process. A work truck. A job trailer. A laydown yard. A morning meeting. A coffee station. An edge drain installation. You get the point.

Here’s a simple example of how this looks in practice:

Standardizing Your Jobsite Toolbox

- **Sort:** What tools do we actually use every day? Get rid of the rest.
- **Sweep:** Replace missing tools, fix broken latches, and wipe down surfaces.
- **Standardize:** Label each slot, snap a photo of the standard layout, and tape it inside the lid.

That’s it.

Now every crew knows what’s supposed to be there, where it goes, and how it should look before they leave.

The ROI of Standardization

Let’s be blunt. Standardization produces the following positive results:

1. Fewer callbacks
2. Fewer texts like, “Where’s the ____?”
3. Fewer training delays
4. More repeatable jobs
5. More confident team members

And the big one?

You stop being the walking, talking, one-man knowledge base.

Standards give your team the ability to execute per expectation without you standing over them.

They multiply your effectiveness. They give you room to grow.

“Standards give your team the ability to execute per expectation without you standing over them.”

Don't Wait Until You're Drowning

If you wait until you “have time” to standardize, you'll never do it.

Instead, block 15 minutes today. Pick one thing that bugs you. And run it through the 3S process.

Make the improvement visual. Take a photo. Stick it in a GembaDoc. Then communicate it to your team.

Standardization is a muscle. And once your team starts to build it, the chaos starts to shrink.

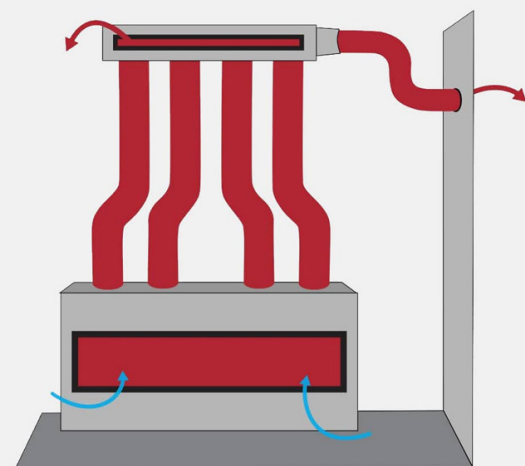
Your Next Steps

I built a cheat sheet to make starting your lean journey easy. It includes simple instructions, tool recommendations (including GembaDocs discount code), and links to free resources (like 2 Second Lean).

[Click here to download this Lean Dirt Cheat Sheet.](#)

And if you're ready to build a culture of continuous improvement, [schedule a 30-minute call with me.](#)

Let's start turning your chaos into clarity—one standard process at a time.



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