Valuing Employees: Thoughts on the Peak Academy

Written by Erin Brown, Deputy Executive Director for Recreation

I must be honest, I initially engaged with Peak because I thought, if I am going to ask staff to be innovative and efficient, I need to understand some of the tools and methods available to lead change. Not just change because I think it can be done better, but change to improve how we value our work within recreation.

When I finished the required reading for Black Belt, I was not sure how Peak fit with the work we do in my department. We serve the public and provide programs, we don’t make widgets. By mid-day of the first Black Belt class session, I had my “ah ha moment” when I recognized that the way we serve our internal and external customers makes a difference in how employees value the work performed.

When I completed Black Belt and returned to my office, I shared my experience with my team and told them why I thought it was beneficial. One of my takeaways from Peak was that process improvement is most successful when frontline staff is involved and engaged in creating improvement. I also found it was difficult to convey my excitement about Peak because the staff didn’t fully understand what I was talking about, so I started to send staff in key leadership positions to the training. Before long, it caught on and I began to see the willingness in staff to improve, and not just change process.

To date the Recreation Department has made a commitment to involve employees in finding solutions, improving processes, developing performance metrics, and tracking innovations. Not only are we using Peak methodologies to evaluate and structure core program initiatives, we are currently utilizing Peak strategies to standardize work and improve processes as we undertake a major software implementation. During this implementation we have staff teams owning processes, and many are involved in making key decisions within our department.
Accela | Taking on Phase 2

The Peak team recently helped determine the design of Phase 2 of the Accela permitting project. Phase 2 Design was hindered by thirteen unresolved business process issues with many of these issues crossing departmental boundaries.

The Peak team used a variety of tools, including Process Maps and Relationship Matrices, to resolve and document the outstanding issues. The team facilitated workshops with many subject matter experts from a wide variety of City agencies.

The team was able to meet a very aggressive deadline and has helped set the stage for future Accela successes. Phase 1 of the Accela project is going live in June of 2014, Phase 2 will go live in November 2014, and Phase 3 will be completed in mid-2015. Tom Chase, Kent Lighthall, and Brian Pool served as the primary facilitators for this important endeavor.

Erin Brown continued
Denver Parks and Recreation is fortunate to have 19 Black Belts in our department and our ranks are growing every month. In addition to our Black Belts, the Recreation team has also completed Green Belt training for 96 full time staff members. Many of these trainees have already begun working on potential innovations; we are expecting great ideas to come from this effort.

In 2014 we will continue to work closely with the Peak Performance team on a value stream analysis to evaluate our current state and refine our vision and work plan goals for 2014 -2015.

Erin Brown
Deputy Executive Director for Recreation

Peak Goes Bilingual | Green Belt in Spanish

Revision International is a local nonprofit cofounded by Joseph TeipeL, a Denver Black Belt participant. Revision International promotes self-sufficient communities in Denver by providing backyard gardens. In 2014, their goal was to equip approximately 300 residents with access to affordable and healthy food sources. In 2015, their goal is add an additional 100 residents to the program. Denver Peak Academy conducted a Spanish version of Green Belt training in June to assist Revision International with accomplishing their goals.

This was the first time Denver Peak Academy crossed the English-Spanish language barrier. Faustino Payán, Lean Facilitator and Spanish speaker, translated the training material and facilitated the training for Revision International. The participants were receptive to the Lean methodology and identified multiple Just-Do-Its to create two separate customer-focused A3 innovations: site inspection requirements and inventory forecast and fulfillment.
Black Belt and Animal Care Attendant, Christine Crusan, developed two major Just-Do-It innovations. She completed a 6S of all cat rooms to ensure the safety of staff and better supply maintenance (below). She also set up a virtual kennel system in the shelter’s software program with her colleague, Lanie Zalasar, to reduce the cleaning of multiple kennels and to eliminate the need for Animal Control Officers to radio an attendant in order to intake an animal. Her innovations saved $4,500.

Green Belt and Animal Care Attendant, Carolyn DiSanto (right), completed a 6S of the Animal Shelter’s barn, which allows for better access to needed supplies and a more comfortable space for farm animals.

Green Belt and Animal Care Attendant, Audrey Borsick (above), authored literature to help customers better understand the City’s pit bull ban.
What Good Looks Like

Innovation is about creativity – the ability and willingness to manage and make changes. Here are some (but certainly not all) of the recent highlights:

- A team from the Denver Public Library (DPL) looked at materials disposal through reuse and recycling in an RIE facilitated by Peak Fellow, Michelle Chorens. The team identified ways to reduce library staff pre-sorting time from 217 hours to 80 hours and to increase the volume of materials sorted by 5%. The projected annual savings is $66,250.72.

- A team from Public Works—Wastewater identified the opportunity for efficient savings with the process of lowering manholes for street maintenance. Standard work was developed to implement a more effective daily approach to the process. The time to lower a manhole was reduced from 54 minutes to 31 minutes. The projected annual savings is $178,677.

“If you like improving, you’ll love this course. You’ll learn very useful and practical tools that you can apply to anything you do, and you’ll never see your work processes the same way again.”

--2014 Black Belt Participant

“Thank you for hosting me in the Mile High City for Black Belt Training. The program is innovative and inspiring in the approach to supporting change in government. Back at my desk here in NYC, I’m already planning new approaches to old problems (organizing my emails!) and ordering books from your bibliography on Amazon. I am overwhelmed by the growth I saw in the Denver employees over the past week. It wasn’t that just one or two employees caught on, they all got onboard and I saw the transformation take place right before me. Truly inspirational!”—April Kelly, NYC
Vote for Denver!  
City Accelerator Finalist

The City Accelerator is an initiative of Living Cities and the Citi Foundation, supported by Governing, to speed the spread of innovations between urban leaders to help tackle some of their cities’ most pressing challenges. The City Accelerator will allow selected U.S. cities to pilot innovative efforts that generate economic opportunities for low-income populations and help municipalities run more effectively. Participating cities will also benefit from ongoing interaction with leading practitioners from around the country and share lessons learned to advance progress. The City Accelerator will work with three cohorts of three cities each over an 18-month period. The first cohort will be on the subject of building and embedding a practice of innovation in city government. Vote here: http://www.governing.com/cityaccelerator

2014 Application Process

Black Belt (4.5 day Lean Process Improvement Training)

If you applied, we have your application on file and will be filling up the 2014 cohorts to the best of our ability.

Green Belt (4-hour Intro to Lean Process Improvement)

Teams interested in taking the Green Belt training as a group, please contact the Peak Academy. Individuals interested in taking Green Belt training can register through the Office of Human Resources by calling (720) 913-5628 or by emailing training@denvergov.org.

www.denvergov.org/PeakPerformance

Black Belt Rich Villa explains the dumpster maintenance RIE to the Colorado Lean Practitioner’s Group.

Peak Academy Black Belt Schedule

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www.denvergov.org/PeakPerformance

Peak Academy | Contact Information

For Peak Academy info, training dates, how to apply, or other general questions, please contact:

Email: PeakAcademy@denvergov.org
Phone: 720.913.1645

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