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16.10. Just Do Its

As the name implies, "just do it" (JDIs) do not really include an analysis of the root cause of the problem because that root cause is usually readily apparent in what is sometimes referred to as a "blinding flash of the obvious." So analyzing the root cause in this case is done entirely by observation.

A number of years ago, consultants transitioned from the old way of teaching using overhead projectors to the new computerized method: constructing the materials to be taught in a presentation graphics program and projecting them using a liquid crystal display (LCD) projector. As the transition from the old way to the new way progressed, fewer and fewer meeting rooms had overhead projectors available, and more and more had LCD projectors. A problem arose for some training providers: If the trainer arrived at the training room prepared to show slides on an overhead projector and none were available, the training had to be either postponed or done in a less-than-desirable fashion, reading from and referring to printed materials only. What was the obvious cause of this problem? The consulting organization had not provided the consultant with the proper tools (either a laptop or some digital media that could be used on the training room PC) to do the job in the new environment. The JDI in this case, of course, was to provide the trainer with the needed tools.

Another situation where the JDI approach may be appropriate is when the need for a solution is urgent and delaying can have serious repercussions.

Such an example of an urgent need for a solution occurred in London in 1854. There had been a terrible outbreak of cholera, which ultimately claimed more than 500 lives in a period of ten days. Dr. John Snow came to the rescue. After analyzing the pattern of occurrence of the deaths using a concentration diagram, Snow recognized that most of the deaths were grouped around the Broad Street pump. Even though he did not recognize the root cause was bacteria in the water, Snow went directly to a solution and had the handle removed from the pump. Within days the cholera outbreak was over (The Juran Quality Minute: London Cholera Epidemic)^[1].

To implement JDIs without a thorough analysis and discovery of the root cause of the problem, three factors must be present:

1. The need for change must be urgent. Don't use the JDI approach just because it is quick and easy.
2. The change must carry a low cost of failure. What if you're wrong? The price to pay for making the change must be low, preferably zero. Dr. Snow had little if anything to lose by removing the pump handle. The worst that would happen is people would have to travel farther to get their water.
3. The change must have a significant potential reward. The decision here is, "Well, what if I'm right? Things will be a lot better if the change is effective."

JDIs used at the appropriate times and in the right situations can be a beneficial and effective method of attaining some quick wins.

^[1] Paraphrased from Juran Institute, Inc. "The Quality Minutes: London Cholera Epidemic."