

kai·zen

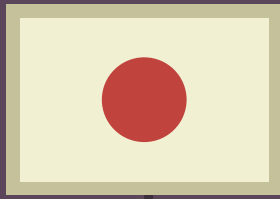
a Japanese business philosophy of continuous improvement of working practices, personal efficiency, etc.

The Japanese word “kaizen” (**Kai = change, zen = good**) literally translates as “change for the better.” Also known as lean methodology, it’s a business strategy of continuous improvement through small and large changes, refinements and corrections in processes and practices that aim to eliminate waste and optimize efficiencies, however small. The idea is that continuous improvement leads to big transformations over time.

Here’s a brief history of kaizen:

1940

The U.S. Department of War institutes the Training Within Industry (TWI) program to improve an American workforce soon to be decimated by the demands of wartime service. More than 1.6 million workers in over 16,500 plants are certified by the end of World War II.



1949

American occupation forces in Japan bring in U.S. experts to help rebuild the country’s industrial base. TWI – small-step work improvement – is key to their approach.

1950

Sakichi Toyoda, his son Kiichiro, and engineer Taiichi Ohno begin developing “just-in-time production,” later to become the Toyota Production System. With continuous improvement at its core, the Toyota Way becomes the best-known example of kaizen at work.



1960

The emperor of Japan awards the 2nd Order Medal of the Sacred Treasure to **W. Edwards Deming**, one of the leaders of the American task force, for his role in introducing kaizen to Japan.

1985

Organizational theorist and management consultant Masaaki Imai establishes the Switzerland-based Kaizen Institute, the first of many kaizen/lean consultancies worldwide.



1986

Imai publishes Kaizen: The Key to Japan’s Competitive Success, introducing the business philosophy of continuous improvement to the world in a comprehensive handbook of kaizen management practices.

1990s

Kaizen is adopted around the world, as its principles inform the lean management, Six Sigma and total quality improvement movements in western business.



2004

The philosophy transcends business, as Dr. Robert Maurer publishes “One Small Step Can Change Your Life: The Kaizen Way,” a book that espouses kaizen principles and practices as a path to self-improvement.

Kaizen continues to grow as a foundational business philosophy around the world, and fuels improvement in a wide range of sectors – from manufacturing and retail to financial services and many more.