

A woman wearing a yellow hard hat and a white long-sleeved shirt is standing on a construction site. She is holding a blue clipboard and a pen, looking towards the right. In the background, other workers in safety vests are visible, and the site is filled with construction materials and equipment.

Gemba Walk Guide

Seeing the Work.
Learning Together.
Improving with Respect.



Lean
Construction
Institute

Transforming Design and Construction

What is a Gemba Walk?

A Gemba Walk is a purposeful visit to “the real place” where work is done—whether that’s the field, the design room, or the office—to:

- ▶ See how the work is really being done
- ▶ Understand challenges and flow
- ▶ Identify improvement opportunities
- ▶ Ask respectful, open-ended questions

Key reminder: “When we see together, we solve together.”
You are not there to fix—you’re there to learn.

Three Steps to Every Gemba Walk

1 PREPARE WITH PURPOSE (The 3P’s)

Purpose

What are we trying to learn?
Why now?

Process

What process are we observing?
What’s the flow?

People

Who should be involved in the walk? Who performs or supports the work?

Be clear. Be focused. Let the purpose drive your path.

2 DO THE WALK (Observe with Curiosity)

Use the Ohno Circle: Pause. Watch. Let the work speak.

DO	INSTEAD OF...	TRY...
Start with curiosity	“Why didn’t you follow the process?”	“Can you walk me through how you normally do this?”
Be supportive, not skeptical	“How come this looks different than the standard?”	“I noticed this is a bit different—what’s the reason for that?”
Invite their thinking	“Are you doing it the right way?”	“How do you know if it’s going well?”
Use silence intentionally	Jumping in too fast	Ask your question, then pause. Let them reflect.

Additional open-ended questions you can ask are:

- ▶ What are you working on?
- ▶ What gets in your way?
- ▶ Do you have what you need?

Tone Check: Respectful, curious, and non-evaluative.

Tip: Vary walk times to avoid only seeing “prepared” behavior.



3 DEBRIEF AND REFLECT

After the walk, bring the team together and debrief:

- ▶ What did we see?
- ▶ Were standards followed?
- ▶ Did we observe any of the 8 wastes?
- ▶ Are people engaged? What was the mood?
- ▶ What needs further exploration?

Decide what needs follow-up via the PDCA cycle.

Tip: Focus on the facts and avoid subjectivity.

For example: The worker was confused vs. The worker was not following the daily plan and was not aware of it when asked if they had seen it.



Gemba Walks Across Environments

SETTING	FOCUS AREA	EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO OBSERVE
Project Site	Work being done, material flow, safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ 8 wastes▶ Material paths & flow▶ 5S—organization▶ Workflow in alignment with weekly work plan
Design Team	Processes, information flow & handoffs, mockups or current operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Alignment with documented processes.▶ Where information is stored and accessed.▶ Current facility operations of mockups of future facilities.
Office	Standard work, handoffs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Alignment with documented standard work.▶ Observing a meeting for intended purpose alignment▶ Handoffs or decisions

Tips for Leading a Great Walk

Gemba Walks are not about fixing, proving, or auditing—they're about learning, listening, and showing respect for the people doing the work. Use these tips to guide your approach:

- ▶ **Start with purpose.** Be clear on what you're observing and why. Share this with your walk team and those you'll engage with.
- ▶ **Walk with, not over people.** You're there as a learner, not a judge.
- ▶ **Let the work teach you.** Stand in the Ohno Circle. Watch. Listen. Resist the urge to jump in.
- ▶ **Don't try to fix during the walk—observe, ask, reflect.** Save improvement conversations for the debrief.
- ▶ **Set rules of engagement.** Agree in advance on tone, roles, and what's appropriate to discuss during the walk.
- ▶ **Respect the people doing the work.** This is not about catching errors—it's about understanding their world and honoring their expertise.
- ▶ **Be present and curious.** Use open-ended questions. Avoid assumptions or leading language.
- ▶ **Gemba Walks are not audits.** They are a cultural practice of continuous improvement grounded in humility and shared learning.
- ▶ **Use the A3 to guide—not dominate—the conversation.** It's a reflection tool, not a checklist.
- ▶ **Follow up.** A Gemba Walk without reflection and action is just a walk.

“When we see together, we solve together.”

Additional Resources

SCAN TO VIEW SUPPORTING RESOURCES

Gemba Walks Lean Topic



Gemba Walk eLearning Course



Publication: *Gemba Walks*
by Jim Womack



Contact Us

