

## 5S: Colored Dots Exercise

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### Concept:

Originating in Japan, 5S is the most fundamental Lean tool that is used to clean a work area in order to improve workflow efficiency and effectiveness. The Colored Dots exercise supplements the traditional 5S series of housekeeping steps to create a visual awareness of excess materials or inventory within a work space.

### Indications for use:

- To increase process efficiency and workspace utilization by people and materials
- To improve inventory control and reduce workstation clutter
- To increase employee engagement and satisfaction with work environment

### Methodology:

Supplies: Colored Dots (Green, Yellow, Red, and Blue)

### Approach:

1. Assign criteria to each color dependent upon frequency of use, such as:
  - **Green** – Use daily or multiple times per week. Must remain at workstation; workflow interrupted if not readily available (no travel steps).  
Examples are centrifuge balance tubes, test tube racks, and high volume supplies accessed at least once per shift.
  - **Yellow** – Use weekly, or critical when needed. Needs to be close to the workstation; utilize often to once a week (few travel steps; not in immediate work area but close).  
Examples are SOP/reference manuals, common supplies that need replenishing each day or week, some reagent storage areas, and refrigerators.
  - **Blue** – Rarely used. Does not need to be close to workstation; utilize rarely but needs to be accessible (travel outside of primary area acceptable).  
Examples are instrument printouts and older instrument maintenance and QC records. Clerical supplies such as hanging files and binders can be placed in storage areas.
  - **Red** – Never used. Just taking up valuable space; item could be placed in long-term storage, sold, or discarded.  
Examples are old equipment, maintenance and QC from discontinued procedures, expired supplies, and outdated reference materials.
2. Distribute dots to employees for placement within a specified area. Explain that multiple colors can be placed on the same item dependent upon different individual interpretation, variation between shift workflows, or personal use. That's acceptable and will stimulate discussion and consensus.
3. Allow placement of dots for approximately one week before taking any action, as it allows time for most employees on all shifts to participate.
4. Implement the desired changes and ENJOY the improved workplace!