

We're struggling to get our plant managers out into the shop floor for their leader standard work practices

This is a common failure mode—and it's usually not a motivation problem. It's a system design problem.

If plant managers aren't going to the floor, something in the environment is making that the "rational" choice.

Let's break it down diagnostically before jumping to countermeasures.

1. Start with a blunt question: what's winning their time?

In practice, I see four dominant patterns:

A. Administrative gravity (most common)

- Inbox, meetings, reports dominate the day
- "I'll go to the floor later" keeps getting deferred

B. Misaligned incentives

- They're measured on output, cost, or firefighting
- Not on process visibility, coaching, or stability

C. Psychological discomfort (often unspoken)

- Going to the floor exposes problems they don't feel equipped to handle
- Or it creates accountability they'd rather avoid

D. Lack of clarity on *what good looks like*

- "Go see" is vague
- LSW becomes a checkbox, not a behavior with purpose

Which of these feels closest to your situation?

2. Failure mode in Leader Standard Work (LSW)

Many organizations implement LSW like this:

- Static checklist
- Same every day
- Compliance-driven (“did you do it?”)

That tends to degrade quickly.

What’s missing is **purpose and feedback**.

Leader standard work should:

- Surface abnormalities
- Trigger coaching conversations
- Change behavior based on what’s learned

If it’s not doing those things, it becomes administrative waste.

3. Countermeasures (structured, not motivational)

1. Redesign LSW around *time blocks*, not tasks

Instead of:

- “Do Gemba walk”

Define:

- 9:00–10:00 = floor presence (non-negotiable)

This is basic but powerful—you're reducing decision friction.

2. Narrow the focus of the walk

Most LSW fails because it’s too broad.

Give a constraint:

- “Today: focus only on standard work adherence”
- “This week: focus only on flow interruptions”

You’re increasing signal-to-noise.

3. Require an observable output

If there's no output, it won't stick.

Examples:

- 1 documented coaching interaction per day
- 1 identified abnormality with follow-up
- 1 reflection logged (what did I learn?)

Not for policing—this is about reinforcing learning.

4. Shift from "did you go?" to "what did you learn?"

This is subtle but critical.

Bad question:

- "Did you complete your LSW?"

Better:

- "What surprised you on the floor today?"
- "What problem did you understand more deeply?"

This reinforces intent, not compliance.

5. Remove competing work (this is the hard part)

If you don't subtract, nothing changes.

You may need to:

- Cancel or shorten recurring meetings
- Delegate reporting
- Eliminate low-value approvals

Otherwise, LSW will always lose.

6. Make absence visible (carefully)

You can use:

- Visual boards showing LSW completion
- Or better: showing *insights generated*

But be careful—this can backfire into performative compliance.

7 Model it at the next level up

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Behavior cascades.

4. A more uncomfortable hypothesis

In some organizations, resistance to LSW is rational because:

- The system punishes transparency
- Problems raised on the floor lead to blame, not support
- Leaders have learned: “stay in the office, stay safe”

If that’s even partially true, no amount of scheduling will fix it.

5. Quick diagnostic you can run this week

Ask each plant manager:

“In the last 5 days, what’s one thing you learned on the floor that changed your thinking?”

If answers are vague or absent, you don’t have LSW—you have theater.

6. A different framing (often effective)

Instead of:

- “You need to do your LSW”

Try:

- “You’re currently managing a *report of reality*, not reality itself”

That often reframes the gap without sounding like enforcement.

Questions for you (to tighten this)

1. What does their current LSW actually specify—time, tasks, or both?
2. How are plant managers currently evaluated?
3. What typically happens when they surface a problem from the floor?
4. Who do they report to—and does that person practice LSW credibly?

If you share those, I can help you design a more targeted intervention rather than generic best practices.



new issue - help me create an A3 on this step by step

Yes. I'll assume the issue is:

Plant managers are not consistently getting onto the shop floor to carry out leader standard work.

Let's build the A3 in sequence. I'll keep this practical and draftable.

A3 Step 1: Title

Use a title that states the gap, not the solution.

Good options:

- **Improving Plant Manager Adherence to Leader Standard Work on the Shop Floor**
- **Increasing Plant Manager Shop Floor Presence Through Effective Leader Standard Work**
- **Closing the Gap in Plant Manager Gemba Time**

My recommendation:

Improving Plant Manager Leader Standard Work Execution on the Shop Floor

A3 Step 2: Background / Business Need

This section answers: why does this matter?

Draft:

Leader standard work is intended to create routine visibility to operations, strengthen coaching, surface abnormalities earlier, and reinforce accountability for safety, quality, delivery, cost, and morale. In our plants, plant managers are not consistently spending time on the shop floor as intended. As a result, problems may be identified later, frontline support is reduced, and leader standard work risks becoming a paperwork exercise instead of a management practice.

You can tighten this further by inserting specifics such as:

- how many plants
- why this matters now
- what impact you suspect on performance or culture

A stronger version, once you add facts:

Across X plants, plant managers are expected to complete daily/weekly shop floor leader standard work. Current execution is inconsistent, reducing direct observation of operations, delaying escalation of abnormalities, and weakening coaching and accountability at the point of work.

A3 Step 3: Current Condition

Now define the situation with facts, not opinions.

You want to answer:

- What is supposed to happen?
- What actually happens?
- How often?
- Since when?
- Where does it vary?

Use a structure like this:

Expected condition

Plant managers are expected to spend ___ minutes/hours per day or per week on the shop floor performing defined leader standard work activities, including ____, ____, and ____.

Actual condition

In practice, shop floor presence is inconsistent. Some plant managers complete portions of their standard work, but many are pulled into meetings, email, reporting,

and issue escalation. Execution varies by plant and by day. In some cases, leader standard work is deferred, abbreviated, or missed entirely.

Evidence to gather

Before writing the final A3, collect:

- documented expectation for LSW
- actual calendar data or direct observation
- percent of scheduled walks completed
- time spent on floor vs in meetings
- number of missed LSW cycles per week
- variation by plant or manager

Here's a fill-in version:

Plant managers are expected to complete ___ shop floor leader standard work cycles per ___, with each cycle lasting approximately ___. Current observation shows actual completion at ___%, with wide variation from ___ to ___. The most commonly cited reasons for missed execution are ___, ___, and ___.

Important: don't write "they don't prioritize it." That's a conclusion, not a fact.

A3 Step 4: Problem Statement

This should define the gap clearly.

Formula:

Expected condition – actual condition – impact

Draft:

Plant managers are expected to complete routine shop floor leader standard work to support visibility, coaching, and rapid problem identification. Currently, execution is inconsistent and below expectation, with time on the floor frequently displaced by meetings, administrative work, and reactive problem-solving. This reduces direct leadership presence at the point of work and weakens daily management.

A crisper version:

Although plant managers are expected to perform routine shop floor leader standard work, actual execution is inconsistent and below target. This limits real-time understanding of operational conditions, delays problem identification, and reduces coaching of frontline leaders.

A3 Step 5: Target Condition / Goal

This must be specific and time-bound.

Examples:

- Increase completion of scheduled plant manager shop floor LSW from 40% to 90% by June 30
- Increase average weekly floor time from 1.5 hours to 5 hours within 8 weeks
- Achieve 95% adherence to defined daily LSW route and reflection process across all plants by end of Q2

Choose one primary metric and maybe one balancing metric.

Example:

By June 30, increase plant manager completion of scheduled shop floor leader standard work from ___% to ___%, while maintaining required plant performance review activities and not increasing total weekly working hours.

That balancing piece matters. Otherwise they'll "comply" by working longer.

A3 Step 6: Analysis

Now we examine causes. Don't jump to countermeasures yet.

A useful cause tree here would likely include these categories:

Likely cause themes

1. Work design

- LSW not time-blocked
- unclear sequence or route
- too many items in the checklist

2. Competing priorities

- meetings during intended floor time
- excessive reporting/admin
- firefighting culture

3. Management system

- no review of LSW quality
- focus on completion, not learning
- no escalation/support when LSW is blocked

4. Capability / confidence

- managers unsure what to observe
- weak coaching routines
- uncertainty about how to respond to abnormalities

5. Leadership reinforcement

- next-level leaders do not model it
- LSW not tied to performance expectations
- office-based management remains normalized

You could turn this into a 5 Whys thread:

Problem: Plant managers are not consistently on the shop floor for LSW.

Why?

Because scheduled floor time is frequently displaced by meetings, email, and urgent issues.

Why?

Because shop floor LSW is not protected as a fixed priority in the daily schedule.

Why?

Because the organization tolerates interruption of LSW for administrative and reactive work.

Why?

Because leaders are measured and reinforced more for short-term responsiveness and reporting than for direct observation and coaching.

Why?

Because the management system has not clearly defined, protected, and reviewed effective plant manager standard work.

That might be close, but don't lock it in until you test it.

What to do now

Interview or observe 3–5 plant managers and ask:

- What is your expected LSW routine?
- How often does it actually happen?
- What usually interrupts it?
- What part of LSW adds the most value?
- What part feels like waste?
- What happens when you miss it?

- What happens when you surface a problem from the floor?

That last question is especially important. Sometimes the hidden cause is: "Going to the floor creates more trouble than support."

A3 Step 7: Countermeasures

Only after the analysis.

Potential countermeasures, depending on what you confirm:

Countermeasure set A: protect the time

- Block fixed floor time on calendars
- Move recurring meetings out of that window
- Create escalation rules for what can interrupt LSW

Countermeasure set B: simplify the work

- Reduce LSW to a focused route and a few key checks
- Define one purpose per walk: safety, flow, standard work, abnormalities

Countermeasure set C: improve review

- Review not just completion, but what was learned
- Ask weekly: what abnormalities were identified, escalated, and resolved?

Countermeasure set D: reinforce from above

- Require next-level leaders to confirm and support the routine
- Model the behavior at director/VP level

Countermeasure set E: build skill

- Train plant managers on observation and coaching
- Use short reflection prompts after each floor walk

Do not put all five into the A3 unless needed. Pick the smallest set that addresses the confirmed causes.

A3 Step 8: Implementation Plan

Use a simple table with:

- action
- owner
- due date
- expected outcome

Example:

Action	Owner	Due Date	Expected Outcome
Define standard daily LSW time block and route	Ops leader	Apr 5	Clear expected routine
Audit plant manager calendars for conflicts	HR/Ops	Apr 8	Major interruptions identified
Pilot protected floor time in 1–2 plants	Plant managers	Apr 15	Test feasibility
Introduce weekly review of LSW insights	VP Ops	Apr 20	Reinforcement of learning
Measure adherence and floor time weekly	CI lead	Apr 20 onward	Visibility to progress

A3 Step 9: Follow-Up / Check

Decide now how you'll know whether it's working.

Measures:

- % of scheduled LSW cycles completed
- average floor time per manager per week
- number of coaching interactions documented
- number of abnormalities identified/escalated
- manager and supervisor feedback on usefulness
- reduction in "missed due to meetings" or "missed due to admin work"

Also watch for bad side effects:

- checklist theater
- longer workdays
- fake compliance
- floor presence without engagement

A3 Step 10: Draft the one-page storyline

Here is a concise first-pass A3 narrative you could build from:

Title

Improving Plant Manager Leader Standard Work Execution on the Shop Floor

Background

Leader standard work is intended to strengthen operational visibility, coaching, and early detection of abnormalities. In our plants, plant managers are not consistently executing shop floor leader standard work, reducing leadership presence at the point of work and weakening daily management.

Current Condition

Plant managers are expected to complete routine shop floor leader standard work, but execution is inconsistent. Time intended for floor presence is frequently displaced by meetings, administrative work, and reactive issue management. Variation exists across plants and managers, and the quality and consistency of execution are not regularly reviewed.

Problem Statement

Although plant managers are expected to perform routine shop floor leader standard work, actual completion is inconsistent and below expectation. This limits direct observation of operations, delays problem identification, and reduces coaching and support for frontline leaders.

Target Condition

By [date], increase completion of scheduled plant manager shop floor leader standard work from [current %] to [target %], while maintaining core operational responsibilities without increasing total working hours.

Analysis

Preliminary analysis suggests five contributing factors: unprotected time for LSW, competing administrative and meeting demands, unclear definition of high-value LSW behaviors, limited review of LSW quality, and inconsistent reinforcement from next-level leaders.

Countermeasures

1. Establish protected daily/weekly LSW time blocks
2. Simplify and focus the LSW route and observation topics
3. Review weekly not only whether LSW occurred, but what was learned
4. Remove recurring scheduling conflicts

5. Reinforce expectations through next-level leader modeling and review

Follow-Up

Track weekly adherence to planned LSW, time on the floor, key learnings or abnormalities identified, and interruptions that prevent completion. Review after 30, 60, and 90 days.

The next useful move is to turn this into a sharper A3 with your real facts.

Send me these six items and I'll turn them into a solid draft:

1. What the current expectation is for plant manager LSW
2. What actual adherence roughly is now
3. Top three reasons they miss it
4. How many plants/managers are involved
5. Any measurable business impact you've seen
6. Your target date and target level of adherence

