

Masaaki Imai

Known as the “Lean Guru” and the father of Continuous Improvement (CI) Masaaki Imai has been a pioneer and leader in spreading the KAIZEN[®] philosophy all over the world.

Mr. Imai’s ground breaking book, “Kaizen: The Key to Japan’s Competitive Success” was an instant global best seller, firmly embedding the word Kaizen in the corporate lexicon. It was the first book (1986) to introduce the ‘LEAN’ philosophy to the world, four years before the book “The Machine That Changed The World: The Story of Lean Production”. His firsthand account is based on his close associations and travels with such legendary giants as Shoichiro Toyoda and Taichi Ohno and reveals the secrets behind the success of such Japanese companies.

Mr. Imai’s sequel book on this subject “Gemba KAIZEN: A Commonsense, Low-cost Approach to Management” was published in 1997. This book uses relevant case studies to detail 21 practical KAIZEN management practices, including methodologies and tools to be applied where the real action takes place. The result: greater productivity, quality and profits achieved with minimal cost and time.

The concept of KAIZEN is to make simple, common sense improvements and refinements to critical end-to-end business processes- supporting the overall CI strategy of the organization. Today, companies around the world have used KAIZEN for greater productivity, speed, quality and profits with minimal cost, time and effort, to get results and to become recognized industry leaders.

Mr. Imai’s journey started in 1950’s, taking Japanese managers on tours of American plants looking for the secrets of high productivity. In 1961, he returned to Japan and became the first corporate headhunter and consultant to major corporations striving for a competitive advantage. Twenty years later, the situation was reversed, with Mr. Imai receiving visitors from all over the world intent on seeking out the secrets of their Japanese trading partners- via KAIZEN Tours (then known as Japan Study Tours).

In keeping with his philosophy of never-ending continuous improvement Mr. Imai founded Kaizen Institute in 1985, also now known as Kaizen Institute Consulting Group (KICG). He continues to play a significant role as the Ambassador and visionary of the organization, while actively participating in conferences around the world spreading his unique, convincing message of KAIZEN. The uniqueness is focused on a top down-bottom up approach that engages the entire enterprise to create a KAIZEN culture that is sustainable.



Kaizen Institute supports organizations of all sizes in Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa, Middle East and the Americas, in all business sectors. It provides broad consulting, training and certification (KAIZEN College), and benchmarking services. All consultants must have practical field experience as well as having mastered the philosophy, methodologies and tools of Lean. The dynamic culture of the group remains the same, comfortably under the shadow of Masaaki Imai, while leveraging the global resources and reach of Kaizen Institute.

Books Authored By Masaaki Imai:

1975 Never Take Yes for an Answer: An Inside Look at Japanese Business

1986 KAIZEN: The Key to Japan's Competitive Success

1997 Gemba KAIZEN: A Commonsense, Low-cost Approach to Management

2010 New book pending (to be named)

Mr. Imai has had several other books published on non-related subjects

Other International Awards and Recognition:

1998 Asia-Pacific Human Resource Development Award

1999 Shingo Research and Professional Publication Prize for Gemba KAIZEN

2010 First Honorary Fellow of Quality Control of India (First Fellow ever)

Masaaki Imai has been featured keynote speaker at International Conferences and Universities in more than 40 countries, advocating his philosophies and Kaizen Institute's principles and methodologies.