# [**Who Was Shigeo Shingo and Why Is He Important to Process Improvement?**](https://www.sixsigmadaily.com/who-was-shigeo-shingo-and-why-is-he-important-to-process-improvement/#:~:text=A%20leader%20in%20the%20fields,Exchange%20of%20)

A leader in the fields of continuous process improvement and operational excellence, Shigeo Shingo taught thousands of engineers at Toyota the Toyota Production System, influenced the creation of Kaizen and developed the concept of the [Single-Minute Exchange of Die (SMED)](http://www.sixsigmadaily.com/single-minute-exchange-of-die-smed-definition-example/).

The Shingo Institute at Utah State University’s Jon M. Huntsman School of Business is named after Shingo. The institute focuses on educating organizational leaders worldwide on tools and techniques that foster organizational excellence, using a Shingo Model based on Shingo’s principles.

Although he died in 1990, Shingo’s ideas, encapsulated in his books, continue to have an impact on Lean Six Sigma principles such as cutting waste, meeting customers’ demands, making operations more efficient and fostering a culture of continuous process improvement.

## Shingo’s Early Life and Education

Shingo was born on Jan. 8, 1909 in Saga on the island of Kyushu, Japan. He studied at the Higher Technical School of Engineers in Saga, where he came across the works of Frederick Taylor, [according to](https://history-biography.com/shigeo-shingo/) History-Biography. Born in Pennsylvania, Taylor was an early practitioner of process improvement and worked as a consultant to businesses.

Shingo earned his degree as an industrial engineer from Yamanashi Technical College in 1930, then worked for the Taipei Railway Factory. During World War II, he was sent by the government to the Amano manufacturing plant in Yokohama. As production manager, he increased productivity by 100%, according to History-Biography.

Between the mid-1940s and mid-1950s, Shingo perfected many of his ideas for improving manufacturing efficiency. And then Taiichi Ohno, considered the father of the Toyota Production System, invited him to visit Toyota.

## Shingo and Toyota

Shingo’s interaction with Toyota started in 1955 when an engineer from the car manufacturer went to see Shingo give a lecture. When he reported to Ohno about the seminar, Ohno decided to bring him to speak at Toyota, a rare thing for him to do, [according to](https://web.archive.org/web/20120630224714/http:/www.superfactory.com/articles/featured/2006/0604-smalley-shingo-influence-tps.html) an interview with Isao “Ike” Kato, a manager at the time with Toyota.

Kato coordinated Shingo’s visits over the years. Kato said Shingo’s main purpose was to help Ohno and Toyota in training manufacturing engineers on implementing the efficiency processes Ohno had developed for the Toyota Production System. Shingo brought a wealth of information on process analysis, motion analysis and time study. “All of this helped us to stabilize and improve our production processes,” Kato said.

He taught about 80 classes over 20 years, training thousands of Toyota engineers. Kato said that was Shingo’s biggest contribution to Toyota. He also developed a “P-Course” training program that influenced Toyota’s later creation of [Kaizen](http://www.sixsigmadaily.com/defining-kaizen-the-methodology-and-applications/).

## Famous in the West

Shingo is more famous in the West than in Japan, partly because he wrote prolifically about process improvement and consulted with western companies, including those in the United States.

His instructional seminars at Toyota had an impact on the engineers’ approach to process improvement. His books also had an impact on those outside the company. “Mr. Shingo had a real knack at taking what we were doing internally and stating it in very logical terms.” Kato said. “In this sense he was much less of an inventor and much more of a person that could codify and rationally explain things in clear terms.”

In terms of creating a process, he is most associated with the [Single-Minute Exchange of Die](http://www.sixsigmadaily.com/single-minute-exchange-of-die-smed/). SMED is a Lean tool that is used to reduce the time it takes to change from running one process in an operation to running another. This can reduce cycle time, costs and increase flexibility. The “single-minute” refers to the goal of getting the exchange down to a time that can be measured in single-digit minutes.

## The Shingo Model

The Shingo Institute carries on the process improvement principles taught by Shingo. The institute awards prizes to companies that have achieved operational excellence. It also has created a Shingo Model that incorporates 10 different areas.

**Respect Every Individual –** This means treating everyone in an organization with respect and as a human being with potential. An example of this would be creating an employee development plan that allows employees to maximize their potential.

**Lead with Humility –** Leaders should seek input from others and always be willing to learn. Such leaders can create a culture where employees feel respected and energized.

**Seek Perfection –** Perfection cannot ever be achieved, but the pursuit of perfection creates a culture of continuous improvement.

**Embrace Scientific Thinking –** Experimentation, observation and a systematic exploration of ideas enables organizations to constantly improve and refine “our understanding of reality.”

**Focus on Process –** Every outcome is a function of a process. Understanding current processes and improving them leads to better outcomes. Problems usually involve processes, not people.

**Assure Quality at the Source –** Improved quality can only happen when every aspect of a process is done right the first time. Errors should be detected and corrected at the point of creation.

**Flow & Pull Value –** Organizations create value for customers when they respond to real demand and create a continuous and uninterrupted flow. Anything that disrupts continuous flow of value is a waste.

**Think Systemically –** Only understanding every part of a process and how they interconnect can lead to better decision-making and improvements.

**Create Constancy of Purpose –** An organization’s purpose and goals should be clearly communicated and understood by all. There needs to be “an unwavering clarity” on why the organization exists, where it is going and how it will get there.

**Create Value for the Customer –** This is the foundation of everything. All value in an organization must be created by defining [what a customer wants](http://www.sixsigmadaily.com/applying-voice-of-the-customer-to-operations/) and what they are willing to pay for. Not doing so makes a company unsustainable.

## Quotes from Shingo

Here are some quotes from Shingo, a man who influenced untold numbers of people in the business world around the globe and developed ideas that have helped provide the bedrock for continuous improvement.

* “There are four purposes of improvement: easier, better, faster and cheaper. These four goals appear in the order of priority.”
* “The most dangerous kind of waste is the waste we do not recognize.”
* “A relentless barrage of ‘whys’ is the best way to prepare your mind to pierce the clouded veil of thinking caused by the status quo. Use it often.”
* “Even the greatest idea can become meaningless in the rush to judgement. To gauge an idea as feasible we must cut our ties to the status quo and find the balance between constructive criticism and judgment. Within that balance we will uncover crucial input for making our ideas a reality.”