

5 Tips to Sustain the Gains

Once you've made a change, and that change has resulted in an improvement, how can you ensure that the change gets sustained (i.e., integrated into day-to-day activities)? Below are five strategies you can use to 'sustain the gains'.

- 1 Standardization**

Reducing variation through standardization helps to ensure that new processes are followed. Standardizing tasks by role helps to create clarity around who is responsible and has been shown to improve outcomes.

A team may standardize a process whereby the Medical Office Assistant (MOA) is responsible for taking each patient's height, weight and blood pressure measures when coming into the clinic for a particular type of appointment. It's not to say that someone else on the team couldn't help out if needed, but the whole team knows that the MOA will reliably complete the tasks and they don't need to repeat them.
- 2 Accountability**

Team members need to be accountable to each other. Being accountable does not rely on hierarchical structures, rather it promotes camaraderie amongst the team.

One way to keep team members accountable is to hold frequent, but short, team meetings. At these meetings successes can be highlighted, failures analysed, and course-corrections made as necessary. These team meetings should happen frequently (i.e., weekly) and be predictable.
- 3 Visual Management System (QI Board)**

It's well known that people play differently when they're keeping score. Develop and continually update a compelling scoreboard to keep team members engaged and energized.

Ideas for ensuring that your QI Board is compelling: keep it simple, make it visible, show both outcome and process measures, and be able to tell immediately if you're achieving your aim or not.
- 4 Daily Communications**

Ensure that you communicate your process change beyond just the Quality Improvement team. Daily communications ensure that everyone on the team is aware of the change and understands why it's being made.

Having brief huddles (ideally daily) can help teams to sustain their gains. Try huddling around your QI Board and/or EMR. Try using a checklist to ensure that your huddles remain brief and on track.
- 5 Have a Problem-Solving Technique**

Inevitably a problem will arise where it seems simpler to scrap the improvement and revert to the old way of doing things. Resist this temptation and instead employ a problem-solving technique.

The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle is one of the most common problem-solving methods used by teams to test new solutions. Solutions are evaluated using small tests of change.