

## INTRODUCTION

Did you know that 99.7% of all business in the United States is referred to as a “small business”?

Did you know that it is in our DNA to keep improving ourselves and everything we do?

Defined as fewer than 500 employees, small business (SB) is a strong majority of commerce in the US, and carrying a significant impact on our economy. In a shark tank of competitors, there is a significant burden on these companies to evolve and move forward in the areas of productivity and sales.

When our feet first hit the ground those many thousands of years ago, our hands were freed from grasping tree limbs to move about in the forest canopy. Those same hands were then available to devise tools and to begin to change the world around us. Along with that sea change in our development, our brains began to grow.

If you are a small business entrepreneur (SBE), you are an important part of the US economy.

There are 28.8 million small businesses in the United States, as reported by the U.S. Small Business Administration, and they have 56.8 million employees.

As one of these entrepreneurs, you deserve access to the advantages and benefits of process improvement (PI). By engaging in PI, SBEs can make an even larger impact on the productivity and the economy of the United States.

A quick explanation of the term PI. Process improvement is a generic term that can include many techniques and approaches to PI. In this document, when I refer to PI or SBPI they are basically synonymous. SBPI is simply a methodology for achieving PI and draws on the tools of LEAN, A3, and other proven methods of improving how we work.

Process improvement is a mindset as much as it is a methodology using a series of charts and graphs. It is a belief in the ability of humans to continually improve and get better at anything we do. It is having faith that people are inherently good at what they do and will get better at it given the opportunity, training, and right tools to do so.

Our hairy little cousin shares 99% of our DNA. The image on the right here says it all. We are obsessed with finding a better way of doing things, building a better mousetrap if you will.



We do these things every day both at work and away from work, often multiple times a day to improve the world we live in. We see something that could work better if . . . so we try it out. It is in our DNA. If it doesn't work quite like we had hoped it might, more often than not we will make the needed changes so it does work.

Machines and inanimate objects can't think or evolve, but humans can and do. In the area of communication, we started by painting pictures on cave walls. That led to writing, then printing, and on to photography, and now we have seen an explosion of communication technologies. But none of this would have happened without humans.

But we humans can't pass on our learned knowledge to the next generation, at least not genetically and not yet. Each child that is born has to learn to walk and talk just as we did. All we can do is leave behind the technological advancements, the hardware and the data for the next generation as a starting point, and for them to make improvements.

An example of that would be the old mimeograph. For those of you who are too young to know that term, it was one of the first



Equipment from The New York Times Source: Herkimer County Historical Society in Herkimer, NY

machines for reproducing the printed page that was small enough to be practical in an office or school room where a printing press would take up too much space.

It was a smelly little machine that used a special stencil you prepared along with ammonia (the smelly part) to make copies of whatever we put on the stencil. The stencil was mounted on the drum that was turned by rotating a handle on the side. Blank pieces of paper were fed through the machine by the roller and through the smell and voila! We had copies. If you want to know more about the history of the mimeograph, simply Google the word.

The point of this story is that the first practical mimeograph showed up around the year 1900.

Both during the inventor's lifetime and beyond, others came along, looked at the machine sitting on a table and saw ways to make it faster, more efficient, and thankfully, less aromatic. While the knowledge of the inventors went to the grave with them, the machine along with the drawings and data that gave birth to their design sat on the table for the next generation to ponder and to improve.