

## Are You a Saw-Muri Warrior?

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By BRUCE HAMILTON, [OldLeanDude.org](http://OldLeanDude.org) [1]



I was joining a manager on a walk through his plant some time back when we came upon an automatic cut-off saw that was cutting twelve foot brass bars into four foot lengths. The bed of the saw was about four feet high, just below chest height for me, but just above chest height for the employee who was tending and unloading the saw.

I stopped for a second to watch as the saw operator lifted the bars from the out-chute of the saw into a wooden crate which sat on the floor. He was struggling. There was a grimace on his face as he bent down repeatedly to place the bars in the crate. I commented to the manager, "Boy, there's a lot of bending there." The manager replied, "No, that's inch and three-quarter hex. It won't bend."

In fairness I must add that after the words left his mouth, the manager corrected himself. The point is, he had walked by this horribly designed process every day and failed to recognize the strain, [Muri](#) [2], as it is called in the lean world. (In this blog I'm focusing only on human Muri. I'll cover machines in a later blog.)

At this factory, the manager became a Saw-Muri warrior. He was now sensitized to a common but invisible productivity and morale killer. Too often however, managers *don't* see Muri. They put a person in a stressful job, and he will occasionally have to rest. This is sometimes referred to by those managers who can't see Muri as "dogging it."

An example: Standing with a management team from a large manufacturer on a receiving dock at a distribution center, we watched a truck being unloaded. The worker meticulously checked and double-checked part counts against the manifest

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as the freight was loaded onto the dock. One senior manager who was standing near to the worker audibly remarked to our group, "This is what happens when we pay by the hour" (dogging it). The worker then turned to the manager and retorted, "No, this is happening now because last week I got my a&%^ reamed by my supervisor for miscounting." Mental Muri.

Not all Muri is physical. Often, work conditions will cause mental Muri: concern and anxiety arising from confusion or fear. In this case the manager amplified the mental Muri. The worker's retort however (with a little reinforcement from me) helped this manager to also become a Saw-Muri warrior. We learn from our mistakes.

My own experience with Muri arose out of an offer made to me many years ago to push the conveyance cart for a final assembly production cell. At that time I was the V.P of Manufacturing. I recall that the takt time was about three minutes and material pick-up/drop-off was every twelve minutes. Some care had been given to standardize the conveyance route so that the task could "easily" be accomplished in the allotted time. However, the material handler occasionally fell behind and argued that the job was too stressful.

"You push the cart," he said, "and you'll see what I mean." "Okay", I said, "I'll push the cart tomorrow." "Oh no, not just for a day," he replied, "for a whole week!" And I agreed to do it.

By the end of the first day pushing the cart, I had become a Saw-Muri warrior. A few things I discovered:

- The conveyance route had too many ripraps, making it hard to turn the cart. My wrists and shoulders ached from hefting the cart around tight corners.
- The cart was too low. I had to hunch over to push it. My back hurt too.
- One of the wheels on the cart wobbled (like the ones frequently encountered on supermarket shopping carts) causing part containers on the cart to occasionally spill. I had to slow down to prevent this, particularly when I hit ruts in the floor. When I slowed down, I didn't hit takt time. Mental Muri.
- By the way, I had to rest periodically. I guess I was "dogging it".

These are just a few lessons learned about Muri from pushing the conveyance cart. There were small problems occurring with nearly every step I took which had been previously invisible to me. Today when I visit a workplace I try to keep my Muri radar on.

Here are a couple pointers on Muri from my associates at GBMP:

One of my team at GBMP, [Pat Wardwell](#) [3], advises that to gain employee participation, always look for the Muri first: Help with problems that are in employees' faces to get continuous improvement off to a good start.

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Another GBMP team member, [Lesla Nichols](#) [4], offers a good trick to identify employee Muri: Look at the facial expression of the employee who is doing the job. Frowning, squinting and a furrowed brow are sure signs of Muri. Also, listen for sighs and grunts. These are cries for help.

Are you a Saw-Muri warrior? Share your experience with our readers.

[OldLeanDude.org](#) [1] is written by Bruce Hamilton (aka The Toast Guy from the best-selling Toast Kaizen lean training DVD and president of GBMP, Inc.).

*Oldleandude.org is an on-going reflection on Lean philosophy and practices with an emphasis on keeping good jobs close to home. Read more at [www.oldleandude.org](http://www.oldleandude.org) [1] and subscribe to receive new posts automatically to your inbox. We sincerely hope you'll join in on the discussion.*

*GBMP helps develop a strong and vibrant regional economy through training in continuous improvement principles and is the administrator of The Shingo Prize for Operational Excellence in the Northeast. GBMP's annual conference is the lean event of the year. Contact [david.mantey@advantagemedia.com](mailto:david.mantey@advantagemedia.com) [5] for syndication.*

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[1] <http://www.oldleandude.org/>

[2] <http://www.lean.org/common/display/?jimsEmailId=63>

[3] <http://www.gbmp.org/our-team.html#pat>

[4] <http://www.gbmp.org/our-team.html#Lesla>

[5] <mailto:david.mantey@advantagemedia.com>