Leadership Worksheet – Gemba Walk Planner

"Go to Where the Work Happens"
(Inspired by My Lean Manufacturing Roots & Mapping Philosophy)

Use the Gemba Walk Planner to *go beyond the process map* and see what's really happening on the ground. Slow down, observe with intent, and uncover the tensions driving daily decisions. **Step into the flow and lead with insight.**

Phase 1: Prepare (15 minutes)

Objective: Align your map to the terrain before stepping in.

- **Define Your Focus:**
  "What specific process/polarity am I mapping? (e.g., shift handovers, decision pathways, stability-vs-innovation tensions)"
  Why: narrow scope to one "deviation."

- **Suspend Assumptions:**
  Write down 3 beliefs about this process (e.g., "Night shifts follow the same protocols as days"). Then cross them out. Find out if they were true afterwards. Ask questions rooted in facts.
  Why: Avoids confirmation bias

- **Pack Your Toolkit:**

  - Notebook + pen (no devices!)

  - Stopwatch (track 1 cycle time)

  - Your "Flag Words Cheat Sheet" (see below)

Phase 2: Observe

Objective: See the terrain—not the map.
Instructions:

1. **Watch first (15 minutes minimum):**

   - Stand 3 meters from the process and note:

     - **Physical movements** (e.g., *"Worker walks 12 steps to retrieve tool"*)

     - **Workarounds** (e.g., *"Operator tapes a switch to stay on"*)

     - **Emotional cues** (e.g., *"Sighs when system lags"*)

You will only begin to "see" if you stay fixed in one place for at least 15 minutes

2. **Ask "How?" questions (10 minutes):**

- o Use open prompts:
  "Show me how you complete [task]."
  "What happens right before this step?"

- o Listen for **Flag Words** that may indicate deviation or less than ideal conditions:

Phrase	Hidden Meaning
"Normally..."	Official process ignored
"In theory..."	Reality/rule mismatch
"They should..."	Accountability gap

3. **Probe for polarities (10 min):**

- o Identify tension points: *"Where do you feel torn between [Speed] and [Quality]?"*

- o Note if they criticise something, could this be the downside of the opposite pole of a polarity?

- o Note sacrifices (e.g., *"We skip safety checks to hit targets"*).

Phase 3: Debrief (15 minutes)

Objective: Turn observations into insights.

- **Triangulate Findings**

  - o What I saw: *Operator skipped step 4*

  - o **What they said:** *"It's faster this way"*

  - o **What data shows:** *Error rate spikes at step 5*

- **Map the Iceberg:** Make a list of everything you see that is above the waterline and everything you see that is below.
  - o **Above Waterline** (Visible): *"Skipped step 4"*
  - o **Below Waterline** (Hidden): *"Incentives reward speed, not compliance"*

- **Design 1 Micro-Experiment:** What can you put in place that would give you insight? Is it safe to fail? Doesn't take too much time / resources but will help validate assumptions?

Test examples:

- Pilot a 5-min buffer in the process for 2 days.

- Measure stress levels, not just output.