

How the Toyota Production System Can Make Planning and Delivering Your Thanksgiving Feast as Smooth as Granny's Gravy

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“What is needed, when it’s needed, in the right quantity.”

There’s a lot more to the Toyota Production System (TPS) than that, but that simple statement is the foundation of the **“just in time”** concept (definition below). If it works for transmissions, engines and vehicles, can it work for your Turkey Day Feast? Most definitely!

What’s Needed and in What Quantity?

First, what’s your production plan? Whether you’re cooking for 4 or 14, some leftovers are fine, even part of the tradition. If you prepare too much though, at best you’re going to be sick of leftovers and at worst, you’ll be wasting food. So, from the get-go, make sure you know the right quantity of food you need to “produce.”

When’s it Needed?

Start with the end in mind. If you know you want to serve Thanksgiving dinner at 1pm on Thanksgiving Day, that’s your “delivery” time. Everything, all your planning, food preparation, table setting, etc. is going to lead

up to this moment in time. That's why it's called, "just in time" delivery.

What's Needed?

Next, check your inventory (i.e., pantry, refrigerator and freezer). What's in there that you can use or need to use? This will prevent you from overbuying and possibly having waste. It might also save you money. For instance, say you were planning to buy canned peas, but you check your freezer and you already have enough frozen peas or maybe you have green beans on hand, so you change your plan to green beans. Also, if you're using recipes, be sure to double check your recipes against your shopping list before you go to the grocery store. Check twice, shop once. Also, check the date on those cans for stuff that might be past date! (We'll talk about **kanban** another time).

A Little More on What's Needed:

Remember, there are other "work streams" involved in the holiday meal that you can delegate. Like setting the table, greeting guests or serving beverages. If you assign these responsibilities ahead of time, you'll be able to concentrate on the meal and *maybe* keep your mother-in-law out of the kitchen.

Now you're ready to look at your menu and plan your "production schedule." Some things can be pre-assembled and cooked just before serving. Other dishes, like the turkey, need several steps for thawing, cooking, basting, etc. You may also need to cook some dishes in advance and then pop them back in the oven to warm just before serving. Knowing in advance how it all should come together will actually create **heijunka** and help reduce wasted time and motion.

I suppose, at this point, the **andon** should be mentioned...the magic cord that when pulled sends happy music, flashing lights and waves of helping hands to the rescue. OK, full disclosure? There is NOT GOING TO BE AN ANDON CORD IN YOUR KITCHEN! In the case of holiday cooking gone awry, the andon is actually your phone. Call your siblings, your dinner guests or your spouse and delegate the preparation of a dish to them. And if all else fails, call the Butterball Talk Turkey Hotline at 1-800-BUTTERBALL. No, it's not a TPS thing, but they're very compassionate, and it will make you feel better. Tell 'em Toyota sent you.

Just In time: Production and conveyance of only what is needed, when needed, in the exact quantity needed based on customer demand.

Kanban: A visual control tool that, among other things, helps ensure first in, first out (FIFO) materials flow.

Heijunka: Leveling production by volume and variety to ensure the steady flow of work, avoiding peaks and valleys.

Andon: A system to notify of a problem or abnormality. Often taking the form of a cord that when pulled, signals by light and sound that help is needed by the production operator.