

BREAKTHROUGH

Lean Implementation & Training Resource Publication
Brought to you by Lean Manufacturing Solutions Partnership, Inc.

SCARY LEAN STUFF



**"People don't resist change; they resist being changed."
– Peter Senge, The Fifth Discipline**

By Michael Lewis

What Scares You About Implementing Lean?

Where is your organization on your Lean implementation journey? Just launching, sustaining or needing a boost? Wherever you are in your implementation of Lean, there is a key Implementation tool, often overlooked and some are too afraid to address. Let's be upfront with what might be missing from your tool kit: Allowing operators to ask questions. An operator asking a question is a Lean Tool?

Employees at every level in companies ask questions every day. The people who are really good at asking questions unfortunately are usually labeled, "the complainers", "the troublemakers", the people who are "resistant to change", or the folks who just are "not with the program."

We have all heard them: The payroll clerk, "Why do we do it this way, it takes so long?" The production worker, "Man this is crazy. Why can't we get the right equipment down here?" The supervisor, "Why do I have to repeat myself all the time? Don't they know our jobs are at stake?"

Some managers view these questions, A.K.A. complaining, as useless and bothersome. A common complaint heard in Western businesses is that someone identified a problem, usually by asking a question. BUT because the person did not provide the solution along with the question, the person who asks the question is sent away and told to come back when they have the answer, or worse still, told to be more positive and stop challenging authority. "Just do it the way you are told" or "Because we have always done it that way" become the standard answers.

The Difference

These perceived complaints are actually questions in disguise, not a lack of cooperation. Culture is most frequently blamed for employees' negative response to Lean Implementation.

Peter M. Senge wrote, in The Fifth Discipline, "People don't resist change; they resist being changed."

Some may ask what the difference is. The difference is between people being involved in the change process, versus giving them a solution that they had no part in developing. Let them ask the questions. Let them be part of the solution. Successful Lean implementations need answers to the never ending list of problems that surface at all stages of a Lean Journey; but if operators' questions are suppressed, no one will be looking for the answer, nor implementing the solution that "everyone" on the floor knows will work.

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QUESTIONS, SOLVING PROBLEMS

Who should be asking the questions and who is answering now becomes THE Question. Everyone that adds value at a company should be asking questions and should be involved in developing the answers and conducting trials. Managing the improvements should be Lean implementation's biggest problem, not culture change or middle management resistance.

Everyone in an organization attempting to implement or desiring to sustain a Lean implementation should know basic problem solving skills, and be required to use them. Most organizations have a very small portion of their staff focused on Lean Implementation.

The benchmark for involvement is Toyota, who has involved 95% of its employees worldwide in voluntary continuous improvement programs.

The primary problem solving methods at Toyota are based on the scientific method. Start by asking a question(s), then develop a hypothesis (answer to the question), test the hypothesis (conduct an experiment), standardize the successful hypothesis or start over with questioning the hypothesis. The correlation between the question and the solution is critical. The question always comes first! Toyota has mastered the art of asking questions.

One of the basic problem solving methods taught to all Toyota Team Members is 5 Whys, asking "Why?" five times or more to arrive at the root cause of a problem. Basic problem solving skills are quickly developed as employees successfully solve problems by asking questions and are coached in more complex problem solving, allowing the Lean practitioners to direct the improvements instead of driving them.

Is it possible that allowing everyone in your organization to practice a problem solving method as simple as asking the question "Why?" five times can be a MAJOR factor in the success of your Lean implementation?YES! Scary isn't it? Does the notion of having operators asking questions scare you? Then grab your "blankie" because next month we'll ask the operators!

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"We have worked with LMSPI throughout our Lean journey; there have been many memorable improvements directly affecting the bottom line such as Hoshin Kanri, SMED, and response to problems. The culture change that has come from getting our operators involved in identifying and solving problems is by far the most effective tool used to date. LMSPI has been instrumental in helping us manage this culture change. We could not have achieved the positive improvements without them."

- Mike Mitchell, Plant Manager, Vinylex TN Division

Call LMSPI to schedule a free introductory meeting today! (865)776.9159

Stay tuned!

This is part 1 of a 4 part series discussing the daily principles of Lean Implementation. The next issue addresses how to manage the Avalanche of operator feedback...