

LEAN LEADERSHIP

(A Leader Inspires Others to Follow)

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It's time for leaders to complement thinking Lean with learning how to behave Lean. Putting the two together will accelerate the Lean transformation and lead to better results.

The business/manufacturing world today, is very different than what it was as little as five or ten years ago. Advanced technology, Lean principles, and global competition are the driving forces of this never-ending change. It seems that new technological developments and Lean are changing the way business is being conducted across the world. Companies have seen their market share continually decline and unless dramatic steps are taken may be in danger of closing their operations. To succeed in the 21st century, they must use state-of-the-art processes and systems with a well-educated, well-trained workforce.

Lean is Transformation

Lean is a change in the organization's system rather than simply the application of a few tools and techniques. Lean principles involve eliminating waste, whether it is in time, materials, efficiency, personnel, or processes to a range of non-value-added activities such as rework, scrap, excess inventory, excess processing, delay and transporting. ***For many people, the reducing or eliminating waste is the most important aspect of Lean operations.***

It means to become as productive as possible by using the most up-to-date tools available in the world before others do. ***It is not a question of working harder, but working smarter.***

Lean Leadership Importance

Many companies have had difficulties achieving any real success with Lean and are starting to realize there is a leadership dimension to Lean that they have not properly considered. Leaders that understand Lean well, realize that the main focus of Lean is to eliminate waste and increase value for customers, which leads to better financial performance.

Leadership Skills Required

Leadership is the art and science of ***influencing*** the ***activities*** of others toward the ***achievement*** of goals by providing ***purpose, direction and motivation***. A leader is a person that

inspires the workforce to take a journey toward a destination together. Change in the business environment is much more dramatic now and these factors require leadership ability; the ability to *lead* not *manage*.

The Characteristics of an Effective Leader

Leaders do not become leaders because of an election, title or job description, the title leader must be earned. People only become leaders when they are *accepted* as leaders. While some leaders seem to have a charismatic talent, most people become good leaders by trail and error.

The following are main characteristics leaders seem to share:

- **They have a vision** - A clear picture of a future goal that helps its achievement. Good leaders have big ideas and dare others to be great.
- **They trust staff/employees** - Responsibility is pushed down through the ranks to rely on the ideas and energies of the entire workforce. This delegation of authority requires that employees have a voice in the decision-making process.
- **They maintain their cool in a crisis** - Leaders take a position and defend it even when things go wrong. Being stable even under fire is the surest way to building credibility.
- **They encourage risk-taking** - If an organization does not examine new ways of doing things, if it does not push out its boundaries, if it never makes mistakes - they will never survive.
- **They are experts** - Good leaders are familiar with their organization's products and services. All executives, managers, and supervisors should spend time finding out what is happening and what is keeping the workforce from doing their best.
- **They recognize what is essential** - Leaders have a remarkable ability to zero in on what is important. They can simplify complex problems by working with the team to find the best solution.
- **They are teachers and mentors** - In this rapid changing world; organizations must create a learning environment. The senior people must be teaching and training those who may soon replace them. Leaders must talk to people on the business of factory floor.

Whether the person is called a CEO, president, leader, manager, elected official, or supervisor, the leader is expected to set the example for others. The needs of those being lead

should come before **our** needs. Management is an 8 to 5 obligation. Leadership is a 24 hour-a-day responsibility.

The best Lean leaders recognize and apply Lean principles, **Continuous Improvement (Kaizen)** and **respect for people** and enjoy much better outcomes. However, it is not enough to have an intellectual understanding of these two principles. Their meaning must be understood at much deeper levels, that only happens though their regular participation in Kaizen improvement activities.

Continuous Personal Improvement

The following are characteristics that are most often found in an effective Lean leader:

- A person who reads and researches new trends – committed to lifelong learning
- Wants to try what was read – curious, seeks to prove the reading
- Persistent – failure means understand the root cause and try again and again
- Never stops thinking – problems are a value-laden personal challenge
- Constantly communicating – likes to teach others
- Totally consistent and disciplined – variation in leadership is waste
- Concerned about cause-effect relationships – both task and behavioral
- Humble and participative – not smarter than everyone else and has much to learn