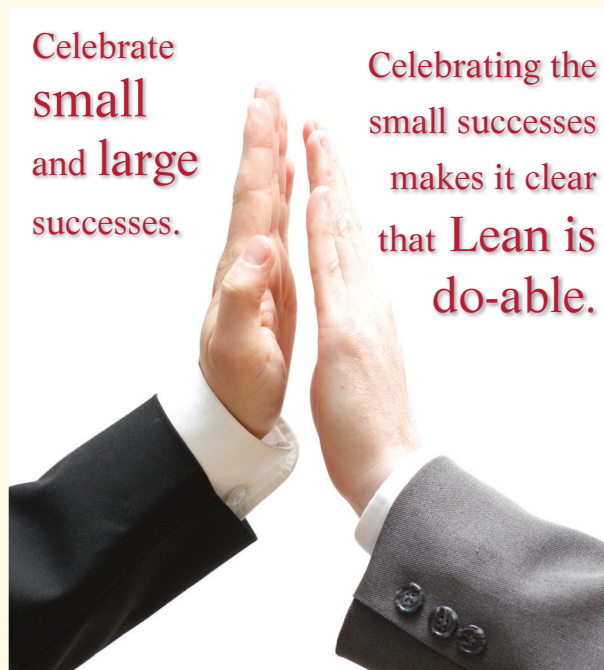


LEAN INSIGHTS

If at first you don't succeed, try Lean again

By Dr. Timothy D. Hill



I had an interesting lunch with a new colleague. He wanted to know about any pitfalls associated with trying Lean again when the previous efforts seemed to fail. What had happened was that Lean was introduced at the same time the company was doing downsizing. People naturally assumed that Lean equalled downsizing and the Lean efforts failed. The company is preparing to reintroduce Lean and was asking how to avoid failing again.

1 Don't call it Lean. Sometimes the name Lean gets overused. This is not a trivial answer, but consider calling your efforts something else. Many firms called their Lean efforts the (insert name of company) Production System. Others refer to their efforts as continuous improvement, employee-led improvements, kaizen or even sustainable development. The point is, if Lean has been overused or still has a negative connotation, there's nothing special about the name — it's the process!

2 Be honest about past approaches. If your past approach got stuck with downsizing, re-engineering, right-sizing or anything like that, admit it. Then say how you are not associating your Lean efforts with those processes this time. Lean is not mean. Be up front in stating (and sticking to it) that no one will lose their employment. At worst, they might be doing another job, but be clear that no one will lose their employment.

3 Distinguish yourself from past approaches. After admitting your past mistake, distinguish your new plans from the old. Don't expect to convert everyone all at once. Remember that a third of your audience will be OK to move on, a third will move once they see Lean successes and the last third will be from the "show me" state and will sit on the fence until they see more Lean successes.

4 Build Lean into employee ownership. If you're hiring, hire the Lean talent you need. Otherwise, start simply by introducing Lean into people's day-to-day activities. Chances are your people were already trained in problem solving, so you might only need to provide a refresher in data-based problem solving. If you have profit sharing, remind your people that Lean will benefit them. If there are aspects of their jobs that are dangerous, repetitious or boring, assign them a higher Lean priority. Connect Lean opportunities to employee ownership. Let them see that their efforts will make a difference in their jobs.

5 Make it safe to fail. Continuous improvement should become your new mantra. Explain and explain again that it is safe to fail. A kaizen opportunity needn't go perfectly — it is a success as long as it is attempted. Everything else is continuous improvement. Encourage people to ask why five times until they get to the root problem. Have them create a permanent countermeasure for the root problem and then have them implement their ideas. Again, everything after that is continuous improvement.

6 Continue with A3s. The A3-sized paper is an excellent tool for communicating continuous improvement. Help your team by showing them how to create A3s that do a better job of describing the issues at hand and showing the root cause problem solving. This isn't easy, but will become much easier with practice. Have people write out their A3 suggestions — keep it simple and direct. Do not add waste or muda by having people use Word or Excel for their A3 sheets.

7 Celebrate your successes — always! Celebrate small and large successes in your company newsletter, through hansei and yokotan discussions (otherwise known as a post-mortem) and share out the successes to similar processes within your facility. Notifying others by celebrating success will be the way you win back the people who are from the "show me" state. Celebrating the small successes makes it clear that Lean is do-able. Post them on your Lean boards, add them to your corporate communications and keep adding them as you achieve each success. For your larger wins, do the same. Try not to advertise success in one single area; spread the word from the plant floor to the head office.

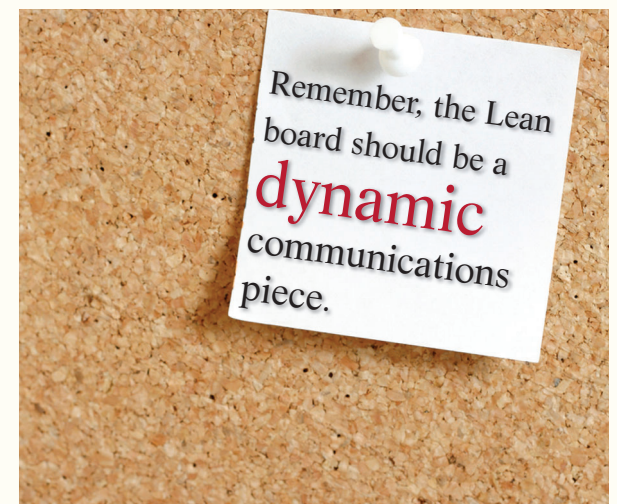
Each item in this list is important, but I would recommend that at the heart of all of them is the idea that Lean will help to address both employee and corporate goals. People need to see consistent evidence that their efforts are making a real difference. Get people connected to their A3s, their problem solving and the solutions. Bring forward the continuous improvement idea that it's safe to fail and remember to celebrate all of the successes you achieve. This is always important, but more so when you're trying to overcome a failed previous Lean attempt.

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Question from the floor

QUESTION: Our Lean board seems a little out of date and no one is paying attention to it anymore. Any help?

ANSWER: When's the last time you updated the board? I ask because I've been through many facilities where they start off great, but then no one updates the board. Typically it's because no one had it put in their job description to do so and updating the board fell through the cracks.



It's important to update the board — even if it's once or twice a month. Put a due date on the board for the next time it will be updated. If there's nothing to report on a larger project, say so and put the date of that announcement on. It's much better to let people know you're still working on a particular problem — as opposed to allowing people to think the project died!

Give someone the responsibility for updating the Lean board. Provide notice even if a project doesn't have anything to report at this time. Update the in-progress events with percent accomplished, the to-date savings realized or almost anything that shows progress.

Remember, the Lean board should be a dynamic communications piece — ideally one part of many communications pieces. If you let the board die by failing to update it, you're letting a big chunk of your Lean efforts fail, too.

— Dr. Timothy Hill

WEB WATCH:

For more of Dr. Hill's Lean advice, check out: www.automationmag.com.



From the book shelf

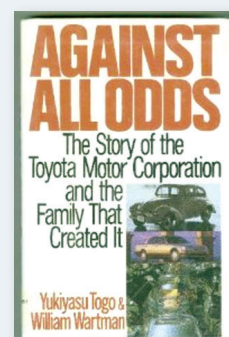
Against All Odds: The Story of the Toyota Motor Corporation and the Family That Created It. 1993. Yukiyasu Togo and William Wartman.

This is an older book that you can still get. I selected it because it tells the true story of how the Toyoda family fought through crisis after crisis to bring forward the Toyota Production System. Toyota (deservedly or not) is in the middle of another crisis. This book reminds us of how Toyota was conceived in crisis and rose above it, largely through their belief in continuous improvement, reducing waste and increasing flow.

When Toyota first started making trucks for the Japanese, they benchmarked, borrowed and innovated

their way forward. Sakichi Toyoda, the father of the Toyoda loom, earned the money to enter the car and truck business by bringing continuous improvement to his loom business. His son, Kiichiro, was able to bring Toyota through the Second World War by never wasting anything — there was no excess inventory — this led to just in time delivery of everything. His efforts meant that Toyota produced cars more economically than any other manufacturer in the world.

The story of how the Toyoda family met challenge after challenge to bring Toyota forward really is compel-



ling. When the Toyota Motor Company first came into existence in Japan, "its ledgers were full of red ink and its parking lot filled with unsold cars and trucks." Toyota's talks with Ford and then GM are presented, all during the time (January 1981) that the US Department of Transportation found that Toyota could build a car for US \$1,500 less than Ford or GM. This set the stage for the NUMMI facility in California. The book finishes with the description of the introduction of the Lexus. Again, if you're interested in how Toyota faces challenges, read this book which starts with the loom and ends with Lexus.

— Dr. Timothy Hill