



# Where Lean begins

## Leading a Lean transformation from the bottom up

BY DR. TIMOTHY HILL, PH.D., CLSSBB, PMP

Many people have said that senior management (top down) and bottom up buy-in is required for Lean to work. In fact, most people have said this, adding something like “20 percent of Lean’s success is tools and 80 percent is culture.”

Notice that I said “culture” and not senior management.

When looking at your organizational culture, it can be said that “you get what you settle for”; meaning that if you set out to have a great culture, you will. If you don’t have a sense of direction about your organizational culture, you will get a culture, but not the one you’d like to have. This is the difference between Sir Richard Branson’s Virgin companies and their competitors. Branson is constantly displaying the kind of behaviour that he wants his employees to emulate.

Many people argue that any kind of change needs to be led from the top, and this makes sense. The logic goes like this: If the senior leadership isn’t on board, the rank and file won’t be able to follow because they aren’t being led in that direction.

But there’s another view. This one says that once you start to create change in the organization, that change will spread from the bottom up and it will bring the leadership along as well.

Lean is still relatively new in Canada; not so much in manufacturing and automotive, but in health care, supply chain management, the office and so on. There have not been very many enterprise-wide Lean deployments.

So why when I have led Lean deployments have they branched out to the entire enterprise? It’s because I’ve used Lean as a means of showing the organization that there’s a different way of looking at things. Once this message is made clear in a few pockets, then it becomes an effective way to go about bringing Lean to the rest of the organization.

Now it will take a little longer to establish a Lean culture. I very

often tell people that it will take about two years. And here’s the risk: Since this type of change takes longer, more might go wrong. The efforts over the course of a year or two can easily dissipate. Other things might gain precedence. The organization might take their eyes off the ball.

The thing that’s been gratifying for me personally is watching the companies that have made it past the two-year point. You can really see the benefits of the seeding that’s been done. From manufacturers to health care clients, you’ll see people who are truly engaged in looking for that right root cause and applying the right countermeasure — all to eliminate a problem and not just put a Band-Aid on a symptom.

When Lean is really successful, people are naturally engaged and they will spread the news through tailgate meetings (hansei) and intra-organizational communications (yokoten).

The Lean transformation is immediately visible with the 5S initiatives. From there, you will see that those changes are sustained and made into standard work. Once they move on to performing their A3s and can become the change that they want to see, you’ll see something that is longer lasting.

This is what will carry over your Lean efforts from the plant floor (where seeing waste is easy) to the office, to design, supply chain, and then how the customer interacts with your business. If you can get your peoples’ heads around two terms — gemba and kaizen — you’ll have it made. You don’t even have to call them by their Japanese words. In fact, you don’t even have to call what you’re doing Lean. Use terms that make sense for your people, for where they are in their continuous improvement journey.

One of the core principles of Lean thinking is having a learner’s attitude. Going to the “Three Reals” — the real thing, the real data, the real place — and applying problem-solving skills will set the stage. Bringing along your learner’s attitude can only help!

This applies for senior managers and Lean leaders as well. One can be a mentor and still maintain a learner’s attitude.

Any skill can be learned. It’s much better to demonstrate the behaviour that you want people to emulate. Celebrate their successes and stand back and watch Lean spread. It will take time, but don’t all really great things? 🍁

*Dr. Timothy Hill is an Industrial and Organizational Psychologist and Certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt with global expertise in Human Resources/Human Capital. He can be reached at drtim@kyoseicanada.ca.*

### Question from the floor..

**QUESTION:** I’ve run into a bit of frustration. I’m dealing with people who think they’re getting it right when they’re not. They don’t know how to do a value stream map (I keep getting flowcharts) and they don’t know how to do an A3. Instead of the one thing that they’d change, I keep getting a laundry list! What can I do to change things around?

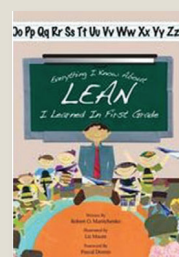
**ANSWER:** Believe it or not, your scenario is pretty typical and I blame it largely on consultants who don’t know what they are talking about. The trainees should know about gemba and kaizen. After that, they should know about changing one thing quickly, doing a followup and then moving on. To answer your question, you probably won’t have much luck trying to change their minds because “they don’t know what they don’t know” and you’ll be challenging their perceived expertise. Rather, start a train-then-do cycle with some new people, post their successes and share them. Engage the old guard in the review of the new guard’s results. I bet that the old guard did not get those results and they will spur him on to change what and how he has been doing things. The very best thing you can do is to convince old guards with data. Welcome them into the fold and don’t limit their participation because “they don’t know what they don’t know!”

### From the bookshelf..

#### *Everything I Know About Lean I Learned in First Grade* by Robert Martichenko

This is a reprint of a book that originally appeared in 2008. It’s about time for it to reappear again because I think everyone benefits from a book that doesn’t take itself too seriously. I know I’ve appreciated sharing something that isn’t too serious with my clients. Its main premise is that if Lean thinking often entails unlearning a bunch of bad habits, wouldn’t it be better if we learned better thinking — and habits — from the beginning?

*Grade* brings Lean back to its original simplicity by showing how Lean is alive in a first grade classroom. The book connects common Lean tools to the broader Lean journey, shows how to identify and eliminate waste, and really lets the reader see Lean for what it truly is: a way to create a learning and problem-solving culture. I’ve often said that if you get that message across, you’ve got a good Lean understanding. This book is a very good general source to engage people at all levels of an organization.



**Take a Thermal look at your problem**  
**A 24/7 Infrared Eye on Your Production Process**

**A615 (640 x 480):**  
 With GigE Vision and GenICam protocols

**Stable thermal imaging cameras from FLIR are the best solution for automated machine vision applications, including:**

- Safety Inspection & monitoring
- Process control
- Quality assurance
- Critical vessel monitoring
- Warehouse asset protection
- Pile Monitoring
- Food processing temperature measurement and control

**Plus much, much more!**

**1-800-613-0507**  
**ext. 24 / 25**  
**www.FLIR.com**