



Dealing with CAVE people

BY DR. TIMOTHY HILL

I laughed out loud when I first heard about CAVE people. They are the “Citizens Against Virtually Everything,” and they are the group of people resistant to lean changes. Some of the people involved in your lean initiative will be on board with the change; others will be sitting on the fence until they see proof that lean works; and the remaining group will be the CAVE people.

One of my senseis, Masaaki Imai, was once asked by Taiichi Ohno (the father of TPS) how the terms kaizen and kairyo (reform) were differentiated in the West. Imai told him that while kaizen means to make improvement by using brains, kairyo means to make improvement by using money and, in the West, most managers only think of improvement in terms of money. Imai told me that Ohno liked this definition and quoted it on several occasions during his public speeches.

What does that have to do with CAVE people? Simple. In the West, if the managers think the continuous improvement idea will not be accepted (read: make or save money almost instantly), they won't approve it. It gets worse if the workplace has a group of vocal CAVE people. You know the type. They will tell you they've tried lean (or whatever else) before and it didn't work. They'll tell you it's not the way they do things. They'll tell you what they've been doing has worked well enough for a long time.

What you need to do is convince these CAVE people that lean works. You want to get to the sources of organizational savings that come from getting the job

done right the first time, by getting everyone to stop and ask “Why?” five times. In short, you really want to transform your workplace by creating a lean organizational culture.

Here's how to convince the CAVE people that lean is worth their commitment:

One: Treat them with respect. Respect for all people is a central tenet of the Toyota Production System. You'll want to announce your continuous improvement efforts to everyone and invite them to participate. At the same time, you'll have an understanding of the people who will comprise the first group of people. You'll direct everyone's attention to this first group's outcomes and successes.

Two: Integrate them slowly. Once you've got your preliminary successes under your belt, go ahead and ask the CAVE people if they'd like to participate in the next continuous improvement (CI) efforts. Connect a few of them to the next round of CI exercises.

Three: Convince them with data, not your say so. You can talk about the glorious results of your lean initiatives until you're blue in the face, but people want to see something they can “take to the bank.” Let your successes do the talking. Chat about them right after you meet a major milestone, note what worked and what didn't and record them. Present the results each month to everyone, and be sure to include senior management in this group. This will reinforce the “lean is for everyone” mentality.

Four: Ask them what they'd like to change. If they don't want to participate in early lean efforts, ask them about what they'd like to change about their work. This isn't a free for all, so there are some ground rules: Don't throw money at a problem. All that shows is you've got a lot of money. Don't rely on IT or automation. That might come later, but for now, exercise your wits, not your wallets!

Remember, they will be CAVE people until they're not! You can bring everyone along the lean journey by sharing the facts of your success, making that success shared and being inclusive. I can't tell you the number of times that I have heard from clients that “Person X” used to be the biggest CAVE person — nothing was done right; they complained about everything; and they did nothing to bring about improvement. Then they tell me about the change! They tell me that “Person X”, who used to be the biggest CAVE person, is now the most pro-lean person they've got — this person contributes suggestions, sees them through, and prompts others to contribute to the lean board or make suggestions. I really love hearing these stories because it means that the lean culture is catching on. It means that those closest to production are becoming the change that we all want to see!

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Question from the floor

QUESTION: What are the most common mistakes when implementing lean?

ANSWER: Lean must never be a tool for simple cost reduction. This fundamentally misses the purpose of lean, which is to empower those closest to production to create value through eliminating waste. The thinking is that as companies improve their processes, they should be able to save time, prevent errors and generally reallocate their resources to new value-creating work.

Another important attitude to avoid from the beginning is the tendency to rush into using the tools. When this is done without giving any background or support to lean, you'll wind up with a new “flavour of the month.” This can be hard to avoid, since many tools, like 5S, deliver immediate payoffs. You want to provide enough background so people can see that their efforts lead to positive change. The best way to achieve this is to make sure everyone is involved in lean.

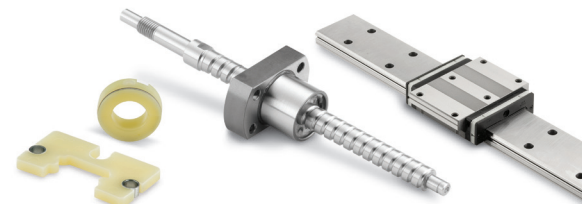
Lean beginners should also be careful of biting off more than they can chew. Make initial continuous improvements in small steps. Communicate their successes. Make sure everyone hears about them. And ensure they have a lean leader with deep knowledge and a gemba attitude. Indeed, one of the hardest challenges is the degree to which individual lean successes will invariably uncover new problems and greater challenges. Simply be aware of how difficult this work will be.

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