



# Top 25 Lean tips

## Making Lean a success

BY DR. TIMOTHY HILL

In keeping with the spirit of this issue — the 25th anniversary of *Manufacturing AUTOMATION* — below is a list of the top 25 ways to make Lean a success within your organization.

- 1. Just do it.** Lean requires a bias for action. Just like the Nike tagline, you should go ahead and just do it. Deploying Lean means you're following a PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle and that it's okay to fail. Whether you succeed or fail, you're following through on Lean.
- 2. Avoid death by committee.** I say this one with tongue in cheek, but Lean should never be limited to a committee or the boardroom. Jim Womack said that while doing gemba walks, he stopped to ask a simple question: "Who — a person, not a department or function — is responsible for this value stream?" That is, who designed it, who knows its current performance, who knows the gap between current performance and needed performance, and who has a plan to close the gap? And, in every case, the answer was, 'No one.' Yet all of the organizations stated that they were pursuing continuous improvement and each had a substantial improvement department."
- 3. Get out there, go to the gemba.** I say this to executives and to on-the-floor people alike. They must start their Lean interventions with a trip to see what Toyota calls the three reals — the real place, the real data and the real problem. They must go and see for themselves, not just take the advice of a Lean committee!
- 4. Lean is a preference for action.** Similar to the first point, you must constantly update your Lean board with actual accomplishments. Never leave the Lean board blank or unattended. If you're working on an audit, write that down so that people know you're still on top of it.
- 5. Don't talk about it, do it.** Enough said.
- 6. Talk about it after you're done. Part 1.** Have a hansei discussion

right after an A3 deployment to talk about what worked and what didn't, and write it down on the A3 that's posted. That way you won't be reinventing the wheel in the future. Remember that about 80 percent of a firm's knowledge exists between someone's ears!

**7. Talk about it after you're done. Part 2.** After the hansei discussion, you'll want to talk about A3's success with the rest of the organization. Put it in the employee newsletter, the Lean newsletter, the corporate website, wherever you can. What you're doing is making sure that as many people as possible know about your Lean successes.

**8. Discard conventional fixed ideas.** Part of problem solving is thinking outside of the box. Encourage people to think this way and not in the same old way that got them into the problem to begin with!

**9. Think about how to do it, not why it can't be done.** I often hear, "We tried that before and it didn't work." They may have had a good idea, but the chances are that they didn't include the accountability portion. Without accountability, you will not have sustainability. Make someone accountable and avoid the "flavour of the month."

**10. We don't have bad people, just bad processes.** For the most part, this is true. By concentrating on the process and building continuous improvement there, you will have the culture change that you're looking for.

**11. Do not seek perfection. Do it right away.** Taiichi Ohno used to regularly nag at people not to let a quality problem "escape" to the next customer. You've got to stop what you're doing, put a countermeasure on it and do it right away.

**12. Correct mistakes immediately.** Similar to the above point, you've got to fix mistakes immediately. Don't wait for the next shift to do it. Don't wait for the weekend to do it. Don't wait for maintenance to do it.

**13. Do not spend money for kaizen.** All that proves is that you have a lot of money. I don't care whether you're in manufacturing or health care, you don't have "extra" money. Toyota says that they use their wits, not their wallets, for continuous improvement.

**14. Question everything. Ask "why" five times.** A brilliantly simple root cause problem-solving tool, asking why five times becomes easier the more you do it. Adopting this as a default way of looking at things will aid, not only your problem solving, but other areas, too.

**15. Seek the wisdom of 10 people rather than the knowledge of one.** This means that you're going to populate your value stream mapping and your gemba teams with people from throughout the value stream. Encourage customers to join in. Never rely on the opinion of one person.

**16. Wisdom will surface when faced with hardship.** This saying is similar to, "Necessity is the mother of invention." Create a burning platform for people to respond to and make it a part of what they do every day.

**17. Ideas are infinite. Execution is the key.** This simple maxim is often overlooked as people get caught up in meetings and so on. You've got to be the change you

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want to see, not the change you'd like to see. It's the same as not confusing better with best. You want to move to better right away, not take forever working out what "best" looks like.

**18. Take no action and nothing will happen.** If you do nothing, nothing changes. Be aware of items that stall your action. It's better to have a 50-percent reduction in waste right away than it is to take no action and hope for a 100-percent reduction in waste sometime in the future.

**19. Quick and crude is better than slow and elegant!**

**20. Kaizen starts with taking a look at the actual place of work.** Continuous improvement efforts must start with a trip to the gemba. The gemba might often be the factory floor, but people forget about Lean in the office, where half of the work starts out being late! It's easy to see waste on the floor, but it's harder (at first) to see waste in the office or other value streams. Going to the gemba will make it easier.

**21. Kaizen requires a bias for action.** Get your teams out of the conference room and into the gemba. From there, mandate a fast turnaround time, have them quickly do a value stream map and root cause analysis for their actionable items, and post their successes right away.

**22. Benefits must be apparent.** One of the goal-setting items is providing feedback — making feedback contingent on performance. Another is making sure that feedback is expressed in numerical terms. Doing so will make the benefits apparent, and posting them shows others.

**23. Show results, not action items.** It's terribly important that you post real results on your Lean board, not things that you're going to do. You must be able to point out your successes if you're ever going to convince the CAVE people that Lean works. (CAVE = Citizens Against Virtually Everything)

**24. Get support from the senior management.** Lean's successes are 20 percent due to the tools. About 80 percent comes from culture change, which is driven by support from senior management. Without this, Lean will be just another fad.

**25. Remember the four main factors in goal setting.** In order to get people motivated, they must: 1) Value the goal; 2) The goal must be difficult, but obtainable; 3) There must be feedback contingent upon goals; and 4) That feedback must be numerical. If you have someone acting on an A3, you will have all of these and you will build the culture change that you're looking for. 🍁

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