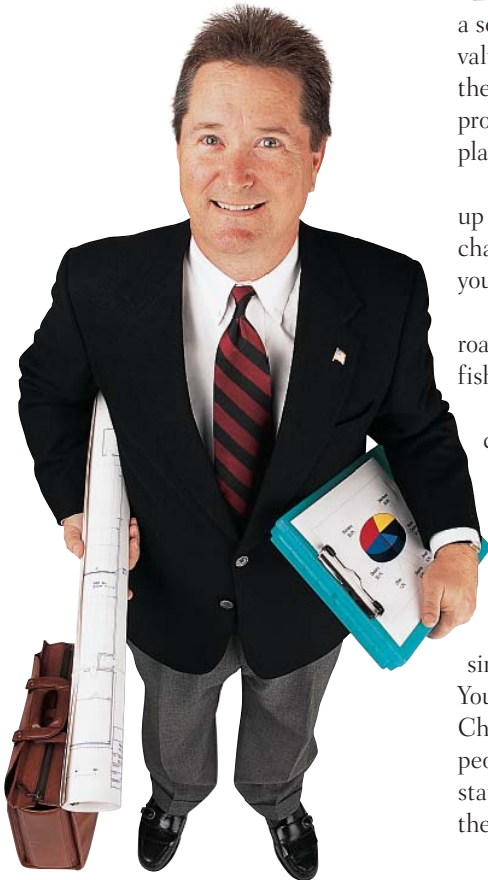


Becoming lean

Creating the right lean team is the first step in implementing lean manufacturing.

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You've decided to go lean. You've studied the lean philosophy, read all the books and attended a seminar. You've completed your value stream mapping and identified the changes you want to make in your process. You have a formal technical plan in place.

Now for the hard work: (1) setting up an organization to implement change and (2) selling your plan to your work force.

It's time for the rubber to meet the road. Or, as a friend says, "It's time to fish or cut bait."

This month's column will concentrate on forming the right team to lead your lean conversion. Selling your plan will follow in the next Raymond's View.

Implementing lean is no different than other change initiatives. Real change is not as simple as moving a few machines. You're up against human nature. Change guru Pip Coburn says that people change when the pain of the status quo exceeds their perception of the pain of changing.

For that reason, change initiatives rarely ever follow the textbook path of planning the work and working the plan. Rather, change requires an iterative process of planning, doing, re-planning and then doing again. Achieving a lean process is rarely a linear exercise — it goes forward, sideways, backwards and sometimes

completely off track. Be prepared to change your lean plan. And be patient.

For all but the smallest lean conversions, you must create an organization focused on making the proposed changes happen. Let's take a quick look at the typical members of a Lean Team:

Team members

The Chief Executive — A company that is truly dedicated to the lean philosophy must have a lean convert in the corner office. Without the ultimate authority that the company owner or CEO carries, a lean conversion will not happen. The CEO must demonstrate his commitment to the change and be the final arbiter of disagreements about what must be done and how it will be done.

The Executive Sponsor — Larger companies or major change projects often require another executive-level member. This person has the seniority and authority to provide the necessary resources, both people and money, to achieve the planned results. Typically, the sponsor is not involved in the day-to-day management of the lean conversion. However, he or she has first-level oversight of the Lean Team and is available as needed to resolve conflicts. Obviously, the sponsor must have adequate time for this role. It should be a recognized part of his/her day job.

The Lean Manager — The key member of a Lean Team is its leader.

This position will have the day-to-day responsibility and authority to complete the lean conversion. This person is thus the key slot that must be filled to ensure success. The Lean Manager has many roles:

Consultant — The manager must be intimately familiar with lean and your plan for the conversion.

Salesman — The manager must be the chief missionary for the conversion, responsible for selling the concept and plan to those affected.

Point Person — In this role, the manager scouts out problems, both potential and real, as well as pockets of resistance in the company. As the point person, the manager is also the primary contact with the Sponsor.

Problem Solver — Once a problem is identified, the Lean Manager must resolve it.

Lean qualifications

Paraphrasing Ronald Reagan's great quote about leaders, "A Lean Manager is not a person who does great things, but one who gets his people to do great things." Obviously, this person must be multi-talented. A list of qualifications would start with:

Communication Skills — Both verbal and written skills are a necessity, especially in larger projects. Knowing how, when and what to communicate is critical.

Persuasiveness — To be the lean salesman, the Lean Manager must be able to sell both up and down the organization chart, from the corner office to the front line.

Tenacity — He or she can't be someone who gives up easily.

Lean Convert — He or she must truly believe in the lean philosophy and your company's action plan. Being a lean zealot is a useful characteristic.

Organizational Skills — In every conversion, he or she will be responsible for the team members, their activities and the implementation schedule.

Last, but not least, on a Lean Team are the...

Lean Team Members — Some experts call these members Change Agents. They are the doers who work

directly with the affected employees. In fact, many suggest that the agents be appointed from the ranks of those employees and among the first to be educated on the lean process. There's nothing like having peers of the affected group on the implementation team.

Now let's assume that you are the Lean Manager. You know the positions that must be filled on the Lean Team.

Before you make the final selections and form the Team, you should consider this advice.

First, know your people — Your lean conversion plan is only as good as the people who must implement it. You may have concocted the most elegant lean conversion in the universe. However, if your people are
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not capable of handling the proposed changes, you are headed for failure. You simply must know what your people are capable of achieving. After you identify candidates for your Lean Team, you should inventory their

strengths and weaknesses and weigh their capabilities against the job descriptions outlined earlier.

Second, assess your company's beliefs — Take a look at what your company believes about itself. In many companies,

those beliefs are negative. People in such an organization will often be heard to say, "We're stuck in a bad business" or "There's nothing we can do to get out of the no-profit zone we're in." As a leader of the lean conversion, you must turn those beliefs around. Make people believe that your company can grow faster than the economy, the work force can increase productivity every year and that achievements will be adequately rewarded. You must ensure that enough optimistic thinkers exist to drive change.

Change plan

If you cannot achieve your objectives with your present staff, you have two choices: Improve the people in your company to handle their Lean Team responsibilities or hire new people with the requisite skills.

Your change plan must be matched to the capacities of the people charged with carrying it out.

If you are the Sponsor or Lean Manager, there is one more guideline to consider — know yourself. At some point along your conversion, you will be disappointed in the project's results. How will you react to temporary failures? You need to know what your response will be, how to honestly assess the cause of the failure and how to get back on track.

In short, you need to know how you will react when a change in your approach to lean is required. How will you deal with underperformers? What about those persons who are contributing to the failure? Will you swallow your pride and make the change you know is needed? Or will you dig in your heels? It's better to understand your strengths and weaknesses in advance and prepare a plan for every possible situation.

Bottom line: To implement a change like lean manufacturing, the right people must be on the team. You cannot afford to risk failure by having the wrong people. Often you don't get a second chance. ▲