

Becoming lean – Step 2

Selling the lean plan to your workforce is a key step in its implementation.

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You've developed your Lean Plan and appointed a Lean Team to lead your implementation. Now for the hard work – convincing your work force of the need for change.

Philosopher Machiavelli wrote, "Nothing is more difficult than to introduce a new order because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions." Put simply, the challenge for those ready for a lean conversion is to sell your ideas to a reluctant work force.

While there are a number of alternative sales methods in the change literature, you basically have two choices:

1. Coercion. This method essentially is command and control – the appropriate exercise of authority to enforce change. While this technique is somewhat out of favor today, it works well, especially when change must be effected quickly. When you use this method, be tough but fair. Impose penalties on individuals who fail to perform.

2. Persuasion. This method basically hinges on the belief that people are motivated by their self-interest. If given enough information about the lean conversion and sufficient incentives to change, they will follow. This approach calls upon the Lean Manager's skills at persuasion and his expertise in lean. Some experts call the needed effort internal marketing.

Clearly, persuasion is all about

skillful communications. People hate to give up the perceived comfort of now for the promise of a better tomorrow. Internal marketing has three messages for the affected workers:

1. Why the company is making the lean conversion.
2. What the conversion requires of them.
3. How they benefit.

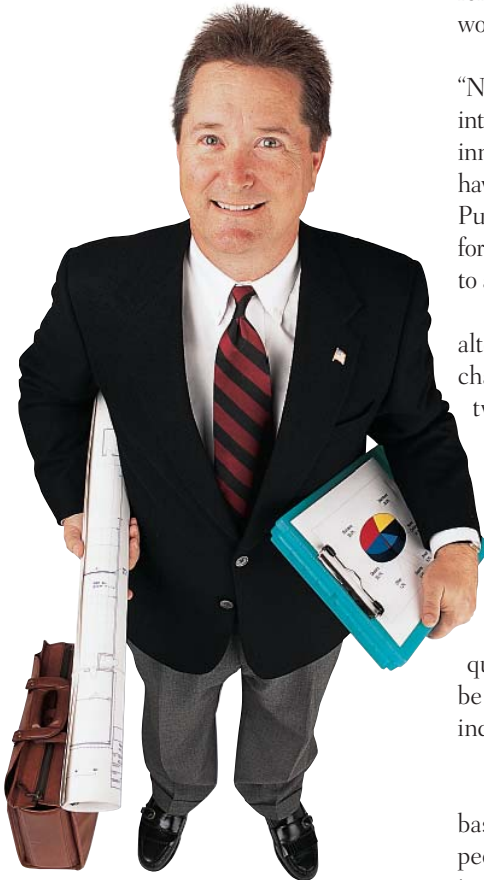
Selling the plan

Here's how to sell your plan:

Tell your vision. The first step is to inform your employees about the company's goals and why a change is required. It's no surprise that people worry about their futures. You do, I do and your employees do. You simply must tell them what your vision of the future is.

Educate about lean. The second step is passing along all that you know about lean and why lean is the backbone of your vision for the company. Experts suggest using examples of successful lean implementations to demonstrate how it works and what results were achieved. A solid understanding of lean is a prerequisite for the next step.

Build consensus. One of your most difficult tasks is getting your employees to agree on the causes of the current problems and the need for change in your operation. Experts refer to this challenge as the cognitive hurdle. A manager's most common response is to put on a PowerPoint show full of numbers, financial and otherwise. But most



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employees are not accountants and do not readily comprehend the story that numbers contain. The better method of communicating is show and tell. Everyone needs to experience with their own eyes the effects of a wasteful operation – excessive floor space, inefficient materials handling, lengthy set-ups, etc.

Explain their new jobs. Then you should explain what the affected workers must do, what their jobs will be in the new lean world. Again, demonstration is a great tool for this step. Consider taking the affected workers on tours of lean plants. Arrange to let them talk with their counterparts on these tours. Hearing the story from their peers can be very convincing.

Measure results. To achieve change, experts recommend that you focus on *results*. To get results you must measure performance and provide feedback on what progress is being made.

One great tool for communicating results is a performance measurement system (see the April 2003 Raymond's View). You are looking to change your employees' behavior in ways that are directly linked to your new strategy. That's what a well-conceived measurement system does; it assigns a task, measures the results and provides specific feedback on how to improve.

Remember you can't manage what you don't measure. You are looking for *results*. Constantly remind your people of that point.

Reward the doers; incentives may be required. If so, you must make it clear that rewards are linked to performance – achieving the target results. Any incentive system must clearly highlight the difference between success and failure. The people who make lean happen should be easily visible to the work force. Business is not socialism. Achievers should be rewarded.

Lean manager's guidelines

As a Lean Manager you should remember five simple rules about selling your plan:

1. Establish a sense of urgency.

Change is necessary because current performance is unacceptable and possibly fatal to your company. Experts advise that at least three-quarters of your staff must be convinced that business as usual cannot continue. If not, you haven't sold your plan. Go back to the drawing board and develop a crisis

atmosphere. Don't play it too safe.

2. Use every communication device at your disposal.

Formal group presentations, one-on-one meetings, newsletters and signage should all be part of your communications arsenal. One company even printed brief performance reports on the napkins

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in its cafeteria. It doesn't do any good to measure performance and not share the results.

3. Repeat the message. Dog trainers tell you that hounds require

hundreds of repetitions to learn a command. Anyone who has ever trained a basset hound understands that truth. Like dogs, people require time and repetition to



absorb new ideas. Make a rough guess of the number of repetitions you believe necessary and multiply by 10. And keep it up for years.

4. Listen. To work, communication must be a two-way street. You must listen, engage in open-minded discussion and hammer out consensus.

5. Celebrate reaching milestones along the lean journey. Have a few parties. Enjoy the trip.

The largest benefit from a successful lean implementation is the new culture created in your company. Your work force will have faced and defeated a sizeable challenge. Change will have been proven less painful than initially anticipated. The new order will accomplish more with less. A smart manager will use this shared experience as a launch pad for even more change. In today's business world the need to change and adapt, after all, is relentless.

Bottom line: A wise man once said, "You can't think yourself into a new way of acting. You act yourself into a new way of thinking." To make a change in any organization, you eventually have to start your employees (and yourself) playing by a new script. Get them off on the right foot. Convince them that their new roles are worth the effort and keep repeating that message. ▲