

## Respect for People Beware the foxes...

A recent article in the UK Lean Newsletter defined that there are three types of Lean participants - Rabbits, Turtles and Foxes. It is our job as Lean leaders to recognize and handle each accordingly. As Lean also becomes more mainstream I am beginning to witness what I call "Veneer Lean". These are folks that have been exposed to some Lean tools and now believe that they are experts of Lean without truly understanding the depth and complexity required behind the scenes to enable simplicity at the surface ... hence many Lean initiatives do not deliver the results that could be accomplished. However any Enterprise Excellence transformation requires foot soldiers so recognizing the types and how to lead them is important.

**Rabbits** Those who buy in and hit the ground running. Rabbits see immediate benefit from Lean and want to get started yesterday. With a little education on the tools and concepts, they are ready to lead the rest of the facility on this journey. The challenge they present is keeping them motivated and moving forward. If improvements don't come fast enough, they'll lose focus. Then you have wild rabbits running all over the farm. However, they can be fantastic assistance in the early phases of your project, adding necessary fuel to the fire. I have found rabbits in salaried, hourly, support, direct and even Union labor. Even today, some of my most valuable Lean leaders are informal, direct and hourly labor employees. These are the people who get pulled from their "regular" jobs to lead kaizen events and other continuous improvement projects throughout the entire business, not just their department.

**Turtles** Those who don't buy in for a long time. However, when they are converted, Turtles are often more valuable than Rabbits. They are often your sustain agents, where Rabbits are your change agents. The challenge they present is not to judge them too early (often as Foxes). Keep showing them results until they convert. Once they convert, they will often be your staunchest supporters. They provide excellent leaders [at times called Lend-Forwards] to other areas of the facility that may be slow to convert. Traditionally, they are also indirect leaders, those others quietly look to for direction. During a conversation recently, a direct labor employee (now one of our "turtles") informed us that he wasn't very convinced when we installed the cell, but now he really loves the fact that he knows exactly what he has to do "now" and "next".

**Foxes** Those who talk like they buy in, but their actions will [eventually] give them away as non-believers. These 'rascals' can either make decisions which countermand Lean or they can be so bold as to speak out against Lean to the lower ranks (behind your back), destroying any culture you attempt to build. Foxes are difficult to convert, and are often those who are moved to better fitting positions or "choose" to move into a different career. There is one other significant problem with Foxes, some are 'sleeper' foxes. Think of someone hypnotized who doesn't remember doing something. These 'sleepers' are often making 'unlean' decisions daily and don't realize what they are doing is counter-productive [some decisions are so natural that we don't really see how negatively they impact the cultural change potential].

For Lean Leaders, it's not enough merely to be a good leader, but to recognize who in your facility (or more importantly, who - above you) is a Leader and who is a Fox. It's all about the respect for people. You may, but if others in leadership positions don't, they can destroy your Lean implementation..no matter how good your leadership skills are. That's why Toyota is so selective on their hiring process. They are looking for people who fit the mould (standardized work?) for leadership positions.

*"Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow."*

Ronald. E. Osborn

Where Lean Thoughts can become Reality

## Respect for People – watch the foxes

There is no magic pill for Lean initiatives. The Lean process requires time, commitment, and determination. Companies that cannot envision the long-term commitment to Lean, and only use the tools for short-term gain, will achieve some limited success. However, without the culture supporting those tools, the Lean initiative will fail, becoming the "flavor of the week" that everyone knew would not last.

"Why not make the work easier and more interesting so that people do not have to sweat? The Toyota style is not to create results by working hard. It is a system that says there is no limit to people's creativity. People don't go to Toyota to 'work' they go there to 'think'" - Taiichi Ohno

[Mike Shipulski On Design](#)

### Lack of product robustness can damage your brand

There are many definitions of product robustness and just as many formally trained specialists willing to argue about them. I get confused by all that complexity, I don't like to argue, and I am not a specialist, I am a generalist. I like simplicity so I use operational definitions every chance I get. Here's one for product robustness: A customer walks up to your product, turns it on, and it works without breaking or getting in its own way. Bad product robustness is bad for your brand. Very bad. Customers do not like when they pay money for a product and it doesn't work, especially when they rely on those products to make money for themselves. And they remember the experience in a visceral way.

You can't fix bad product robustness with great marketing; you can't fix it with spin selling; you can't tell customers you fixed it when you didn't (since they use your product, they know the truth); and you can't hide it because customers talk (so do competitors). There is no quick fix – it takes tools, time, training, and new thinking to improve product robustness. And when you do manage to fix it, customers won't believe you until they see it for themselves. They don't want to get burned again.

No product is infinitely robust, nor should it be. It doesn't make financial sense. The product would be infinitely expensive and would take an infinite amount of time to develop. But how much robustness is enough? An easier, and possibly more important, question to answer is – how much is too little? Or, stated another way, what is the minimum level of product robustness?

The specialists won't agree with my assertion that there is a minimum threshold for product robustness, but I don't care. I think there is one. I call this minimum value the brand-damaging threshold. Here's an operational definition of product robustness that's below the brand-damaging threshold: Customers don't buy your product because they *know* it breaks or gets in its own way and they go out of their way to tell others about it.

It is difficult to know when customers don't buy, never mind know *why* they don't. But there are some tell-tale signs that product robustness is below the brand-damaging threshold. Here are a few. The CEO takes enough direct calls about products that don't work to feel obligated to send you a thoughtfully-crafted, four word email saying something like "Fix that @#&% thing!" Customers have to be really pissed off to call the CEO directly, so the situation is bad. It's also bad for a reason that's closer to home – the CEO sent the email to *you*.

You get a little sick to your stomach when sales increase. You know you should be happy, but you're not. Deep down you know you'll see many of those products again because they'll be sent back by angry customers, in pieces.

The volume of returns is so significant you create a refurbishment department. Or you create a new group to scavenge the reusable stuff off the piles of returned product. Not good signs.

Your product's lack of robustness is the headline message in your *customers'* marketing literature. Now that the brand-damaging threshold is defined, the next logical topic is how to improve product robustness so it's above the threshold. But that's for another post.

Lean Thoughts