

Focus on Lean

The Art of Sustaining Lean Performance

You implemented lean, the results were spectacular, and the metrics indicated success. But now, six months later, the enthusiasm has subsided, performance is falling back to old levels, and the program is no longer considered a prime initiative. What happened? **Perhaps you implemented shallow lean — quick results without the sustaining glue.**

Shallow lean is:

- Implementing business and manufacturing improvements using lean techniques without understanding the dynamics of your markets, customers, and business culture.
- Jumping into disconnected lean projects using a few key people but without senior leadership or an overall road map.
- Done without creating customer value propositions, business infrastructure, lean maturity planning, or changing your cultural values to sustain performance.
- The deployment of short-term results at the price of long-term cultural transformation.

So what is that sustaining glue?

Systemic lean builds a receptive culture and values and an infrastructure that senior management deems a leadership priority. It is making the personal commitment and creating the long-term vision to transform business culture to adopt lean performance characteristics. **This is an all encompassing, all-employees-involved process.** Shortcuts are not allowed; new performance must be defined and communicated to everyone. Results relating to waste reduction, customer value, and cycle-time reduction are translated into workforce goals and objectives. Everyone understands and is involved. It takes more time, more resources, and more patience than shallow lean, but it will last and the "do it right or do it over" attitude certainly applies.

A company must also practice enterprise lean to make the business and manufacturing processes, from order processing to shipping, free of inefficiencies, waste, and unnecessary time — all while providing customers with the highest possible values. Waste is the use of time, efforts, and resources that does not provide value to your customers or your company. Elements of waste include: excessive administration, customer myopia, overproduction, use of resources to cover up problems, extra inventory, transportation, and excessive use of indirect staff. **Waste can comprise more than 30% of an operating budget.**

Waste is described in the eyes and understanding of the customer. Study current and future wants and needs of customers to ensure that your business processes, products, and services, with their associated value, meet your customers' ever-changing requirements. Products and processes today may not meet solutions in the future. Know and change your capabilities to gain and sustain customer loyalty. This transformation to customer value is a prerequisite for sustaining lean performance.

Senior management must lead the charge with a strong vision, long-range implementation plans, and unwavering commitment. Sustaining vision is amplified and transformed into operational values. Applied lean values support customer values and, if successfully practiced, cause positive change in the business culture. This journey is not fast or easy, but it is the proven path to sustaining lean performance. Is it worth the effort? Yes, it can add 30% to your bottom line and can mean staying in the game for your stakeholders.

"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

Designing the Rubber Factory With accolades to Brian Clements

Funny thing about customers, they seldom seem to place orders on our enterprise that supports level loading or the kind of mix model that our Value Streams seem to like. Of course we employ a suite of tools to absorb that erratic demand, such as Lean, Hyjunkia, one piece flow etc. However several years ago Brian Clements who was then the VP of Manufacturing at Steelcase Canada came up with a very simple concept the “Rubber Factory”.

Brian took the concept of Lean to a whole new level, he truly embraced the notion that there are no titles in a Lean Enterprise and that every employee needs to focus on supporting the customer from a customer’s perspective.

Here is what Brian in essence did. First he cross trained every employee in the organization to be able to perform a value add task in the Value Stream. Then like the design of a modern HVAC system that shuts down certain operations to control energy costs, Brian designed an employee reallocation model that would be invoked based on incoming customer demand.

If incoming demand exceeded the norm for the day, the organization would reallocate the engineers to work on the lines, if this was not enough then the mechanics would be reassigned and added to the work force ... this would continue throughout the organization including the use of the sales force and even the President. The only person not deployed to the factory floor was the receptionist who still maintained the voice to the customer for that day.

There was a lot of power in this model that went beyond supporting the customer. It completely blurred the lines between management and the team members on the floor. In many cases it allowed the technical disciplines within the organization to spend an extended period of time working and observing a specific operation. We are traditionally very good at jumping into a problem area and then invoking a solution ... but how often do we spend time in a seemingly well run operation to see how we can make it better, safer or simpler?

Pre-Planning of the rubber factory model is a must so that you can have individuals properly cross-trained and that the model can be implemented immediately. Not sure if you would want to run a multi-million dollar turning centre but he/she may be qualified to become a stock chaser for the day though.

Take some time to design your “Rubber Factory” and make sure you run the model at least 3 times per year ... it is fun, supports erratic customer demand, breaks down barriers and gives people an additional opportunity to see operations up close and personal machine.

If you have a lead foot.....this will come in handy for you!!

I had no idea this was available to everyone.

Do you know the speed traps in your hometown?

<http://www.speedtrap.org/speedtraps/stetlist.asp>