

Lean leadership is simply good leadership



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I recently finished work on a book called “Working Great!: Lean Leadership Lessons for Guiding Your Organization to Excellence by Productivity Press”. It forced me to spend a lot of time thinking about the key factors that influence whether a Lean transformation (or any major cultural change for that matter) will be successful.

The demonstrated low success rate for those hoping to establish a truly Lean culture indicates that the experience more closely resembles an uncharted voyage instead of an oft-repeated tour.

That’s because, even though others have successfully completed the trip, the uniqueness of each organization’s starting point and definition of the destination ensures a new route.

Because ultimate success on the expedition depends so heavily on transforming how the organization thinks — about customers, each other and work — the most important factors for driving success involve leadership behaviors for building and promoting a Lean culture. Unfortunately, most attempted implementations focus on the use of various Lean tools.

They are pretty straightforward. Select, purchase, train and turn loose. But a ratchet and set of sockets doesn’t make a mechanic; rather someone who simply can loosen and tighten bolts.

A great mechanic complements good tools with a thorough understanding of the theory of operation for the machine, terrific problem solving skills and a true sense of enjoyment from helping a customer by fixing their machine. In short, a great mechanic thinks differently.

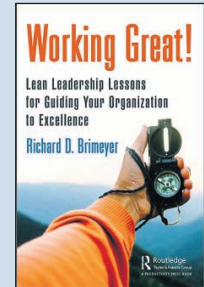
While no two organizations will follow the same path to success, there are common principles that all successful Lean cultures share. Likewise, there are common leadership skills and behaviors for nurturing those principles. A few examples include:

- Aligning the organization around a purpose (hint: growing profits is not an inspiring purpose).

‘WORKING GREAT!’

Rick Brimeyer’s book, “Working Great! Lean Leadership Lessons for Guiding Your Organization to Excellence,” is available on Amazon and at most independent bookstores.

“Working Great” is published by Productivity Press.



- Building relationships with employees who extend beyond simply the work they do.
- Developing employees into confident and competent problem solvers.
- Providing new challenges for growth.
- Regularly recognizing success and effort.
- Coaching issues while they are small.
- Ensuring accountability when coaching is ignored.

Somewhere between the fifth and sixth cycle of proofreading, I had a revelation. The key leadership skills for a successful Lean transformation are not unique to Lean. These are things every leader should be doing, regardless of whether the intent is a Lean transformation or not. As I recall my career, these were the things my good bosses consistently demonstrated and my poor bosses neglected.

Great Lean leadership is simply great leadership. It appeals to the intrinsic human needs that we all share for meaningful work.

That’s why, unlike other business fads, Lean principles continue to thrive and permeate almost all industries decades after being introduced.

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