

“Lean World” Blog – Reflections by Maryland’s Shingo Prize Ambassador, Jeff Fuchs, about the 2009 Northeast Shingo Prize Conference

The Northeast Region Shingo Prize Conference, organized again this year by the Greater Boston Manufacturing Partnership, was held October 7th and 8th in Worcester, Massachusetts. Having just returned, I wanted to share some reflections on my favorite three keynote speakers, and some of their key points.

Sheriff John Rutherford: Lean-ing into Excellence



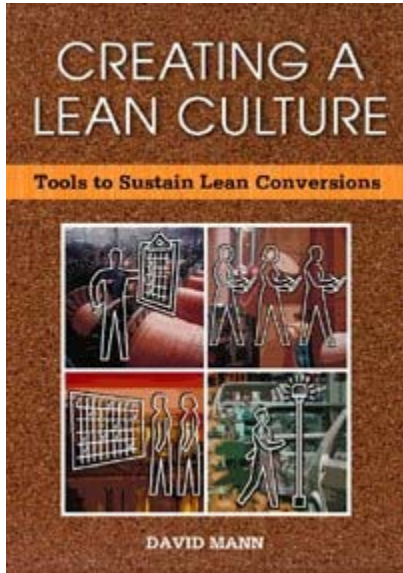
Sheriff John Rutherford of the Jacksonville, Florida Sheriff’s Office kicked off with a keynote describing the lean implementation he has been leading since 2003. Rutherford understands that people are what drive lean success, and he described the steps he took to “create an organization where people want to achieve.” His methods and leadership certainly get results. Employee suggestions went from about three a year to more than a hundred. All suggestions are responded to within 35 days, and Rutherford estimates that about half are implemented.

Sheriff Rutherford’s guidelines and advice that he shared with the 450 attendees in the audience apply to any leader at any level in a lean organization. One of the anecdotes that really stuck with me was about vision. Nearly every organization has a vision statement. It is usually wallpaper in the lobby that everybody looks at and nobody really reads, understands, or lives.

Also like most organizations, Rutherford’s group had numerous binders describing detailed regulations that attempted to define the acceptable actions in every conceivable circumstance. (Does this sound familiar, anyone?) In the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office under Rutherford’s leadership, everyone lives by four simple core values. The Sheriff told his officers that, “If you come into my office and convince me that your actions were supporting our four core values, you will stay out of trouble.” With that simple statement, made with conviction and exemplified through his personal behaviors and engagement, everyone in the department not only understood the four values, but internalized them and let them govern their actions. Over time, the reams of regulations were made irrelevant and redundant. The organization was better aligned, morale was improved, and the organization became more customer-focused and efficient.

Obviously, organizations with traditional leaders and conventional approaches to human resources should take note of the simplicity, the elegance, and the respect for people in Jacksonville’s example. Even organizations who are trying to become leaner through tools like Hoshin Planning (Policy Deployment) should take away one particular point of Sheriff Rutherford’s success: While Hoshin Kanri can help systematically link organizational strategy down through lower level actions in the organization, a simple, compact, well-considered vision, that is properly led, modeled, and supported, serves as a powerful and liberating guidance system for everyone. It can do, through compassion and leadership, what volumes of restrictive and tedious written policies cannot.

David Mann: Standard Work – Process Focus for Creating a Lean Culture



David Mann is author of *Creating a Lean Culture: Tools to Sustain Lean Conversions*. The book was awarded the Shingo Prize in 2006. It is one of my personal favorites and among the most valuable books read by lean companies with whom I regularly visit and work. I had been looking forward to hearing him in person, and he did not disappoint.

Dr. Mann's presentation centered on lean leadership, and the senior leader's role in reinforcing new thinking and new practices. Mann points out that most of the hurdles with lean are not centered on using new and unfamiliar lean tools – it is rather about creating a new mindset. As he explained, "In lean, it's not rearranging the furniture on the shop floor that's hard; it's rearranging the furniture between your ears that's hard."



David went on to describe a model for lean management and tools that can help. Most were straight out of his book. If you haven't picked up a copy, I highly recommend it.

Lean is not about tools or templates. Really, it is not even about eliminating waste. That definition is too specific. Lean is, at its heart, a problem-solving system. However, in order to work, the system must become part of the culture of the organization. Changing culture is a responsibility that rests solely with the leader. It cannot be denied and it cannot be delegated. Leader standard work drives the accountability for daily behaviors that, in turn, drives the culture of continuous improvement that, in turn, drives the problem-solving system. As a byproduct, this system eliminates the waste, satisfies the customers, and generates the results. The key link in this chain is the problem-solving system.

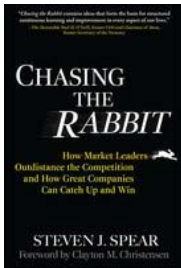
Steven Spear: Chasing the Rabbit – Leading World Class Organizations

Steven Spear is a Senior Lecturer at MIT. How well can a Senior Lecturer lecture? At a typical conference where nearly everyone speaks from PowerPoint slides, when Steven Spear just walks around, looks you in the eye, and explains concepts in a way that you hang on every word, you know you're listening to something special.



Spear authored the award winning book, *Chasing the Rabbit: How Market Leaders Outdistance the Competition*. The anecdote he told during his keynote that completely riveted my attention was described in his book. It was an exchange between Hyman Rickover, founder of the Navy's Nuclear Power Propulsion Program, and Theodore Rockwell, who worked on the nuclear propulsion program with Rickover.

Rickover berated Rockwell for not knowing how the meeting Rockwell was going to hold shortly would conclude. Rickover was not expecting Rockwell to see into the future, or to read minds. Rather, he wanted Rockwell predict what a successful meeting outcome would look like so he would be able to recognize when something in the meeting went off track, and then be able to determine the root cause of the deviation. Without a standard, Rickover was effectively saying, there can be no identification of deviation from a desirable outcome and, therefore, no improvement of the system, in this case the design of a nuclear submarine.



As Spear notes, there has never been a loss of life or a documented incident in over 50 years of U.S. naval nuclear power. We could safely conclude that what Rickover and his project team did, they did right. Lean practitioners in the room may have heard the voice of Taichi Ohno whispering to them as they heard Spear’s story: “Without a standard, there can be no improvement.”

This is an anecdote that goes right to the heart of Lean Thinking. It instantly became one of my favorite stories to help explain lean, and I can’t wait to share Spears’ insightful find with others. What I especially appreciated was that it is not about the Toyota Production System and not about manufacturing. It is more about standard work, process focus, and continuous improvement – some of the principles at the true heart of lean. It underscores how lean principles really do apply to everything. Everywhere you find a process, there is an application for lean. It does not matter if you are assembling a car like millions of others or designing a nuclear submarine that the world has never seen before. Lean works.