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Lean Leadership

Phil Kirby
Thoughtware®

"I make it a rule to believe only what I understand."

Princeton University's fifteenth President, Harold Willis Dodds, was a brilliant scholar and a visionary leader. His rule highlights the greatest challenge facing Connecticut business leaders today in their efforts to implement a Lean management culture. To commit to Lean, leaders must believe in Lean. To believe, they must first understand Lean.

Lean is not about what you do; it's about how you think, your Thoughtware®. Lean is a way of life, a management system, a long-term strategy. A Lean culture requires a leadership approach that is, in many ways, contrary to conventional management philosophy. Lean requires a radical change in business approach even though it doesn't require a drastic change in business organization. Lean means that business leaders must think in a way that is opposite to what they have always known.

In the new Lean culture, products that were traditionally pushed through production are now pulled. Warehouses that historically focused on shortage are supermarkets based on abundance. Yesterday's vertical, departmentalized thinking is today's horizontal workflow or process thinking. Lean is about growth, not the accustomed cost-cutting.

Lean culture requires problems, hidden for years, to be exposed. Lean requires motivated employees to problem-solve issues previously reserved for experts. Today's Lean leader must 'go see' in the gemba and spend less time in the office. The Lean leader's focus is on how to eliminate waste rather than how to make this month's numbers. Instead of setting targets, the Lean leader sets target conditions. The Lean leader isn't interested in measuring results; all that matters is process capability.

It's no wonder business leaders feel overwhelmed, if not threatened by a Lean management culture. Even if they understand the new Lean Thoughtware®, they imagine a Lean management culture will turn their business upside-down.

As they see it, Lean requires them to change their core beliefs, do the opposite of what they've always done, change the essence of how their business works yet keep the enterprise on an even keel through implementation. Lean seems like a monumental task. So, many begin to question Lean's logic and benefits. Some conclude that Lean is not for them.

Other business leaders endorse Lean but rely on traditional management practices to implement it. These leaders view Lean as a tactical program not a strategic philosophy; as technical tools not managerial style. They delegate the implementation of continuous improvement tools to engineers or technologists and believe their business is now Lean. However, they too, begin to question the logics and benefits when they don't achieve breakthrough results despite significant investment.

In today's competitive global economy, breakthrough performance results are not only desired but required. CONNSTEP's Lean Leadership Program helps leaders:

1. Understand Lean;
2. Believe in Lean; and
3. Commit to Lean so they can create, lead and sustain a Lean business model.

With the help of CONNSTEP's Lean Leadership Program, Connecticut businesses will continue to be on the leading edge of Lean in North America.



Phil Kirby is a Lean profit expert and founder of Organization Thoughtware® International Inc., a performance improvement business that he began over 20 years ago after working for years in operations management with bottom-line accountability. He has written two books.

Phil believes every business has a wealth of hidden treasure buried beneath the waste of its business processes. His treasure hunter Thoughtware® enables treasure seekers to think with process minds and see with process eyes.

Phil has treasure hunted from the jungles of Batam, Indonesia (20 degrees from the Equator) to the darkness of Kokkola, Finland (20 degrees from the Arctic Circle) overhauling businesses, bottlenecks and balance sheets.

Phil is a passionate, provocative, and practical speaker whose incredible real-life treasure hunts with an impressive list of blue-chip customers mesmerize audiences worldwide. Phil was recently awarded Best Speaker at the International Lean & Six Sigma Conference in Orlando, Florida.