

The Joy of Lean

Transforming, Leading,
and Sustaining a Culture of
Engaged Team Performance

Dodd Starbird

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to everyone I've encountered on the path to improve organizational performance over the last three decades. While I've included a number of their stories here, there are also a number of other, unnamed contributors who helped to form the ideas herein. I'm grateful to every one of them for the experiences that they've given me and my team along the journey.

*While they sometimes learn from us,
we learn from them every day.*

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Prologue – A Lean Parable: Efficiency is the Best Form of Job Security!

Has your organization tried Lean already? If so, you surely see and feel the Joy of Lean in your workplace now, right?

Don't worry. If you're not quite to joy yet, you're not alone.

As it attracts more and more attention as a successful business philosophy that can improve results in any type of organization, Lean has still sometimes been misunderstood as a method for just cutting expenses. The useful ideas of eliminating waste and driving greater efficiency can pick up a negative spin associated with perceptions of job cuts, employees doing more with less, and managers squeezing more productivity from each person. None of that sounds very joyful.

But it doesn't have to be that way. This book will show you how to cultivate a positive Lean Culture of excellence that creates value for customers, profitable growth for businesses, sustainable cost reduction, and fulfilling jobs for employees. As we proceed, we'll continually demonstrate how leadership plays a critical role in establishing and sustaining a Lean Culture.

In 2010 we introduced a story in the book *Building Engaged Team Performance* about a team that dramatically improved its efficiency, and we will start this book with a parable based on that story and other similar events.

A Parable of Lean Culture

Together a service department's Lean Engaged Team Performance project team used a time study to find some significant process and performance opportunities, then redesigned their process and organization with a gain of over 40% labor efficiency. After implementing process and organization structure changes, their leader developed a positive and long-term vision for using special projects and assignments in the short term, along with planned attrition over a longer time period, to reduce the team to the right size for the workload that the time study data predicted. Over 18 months, the team shed dozens of positions without

any layoffs, reducing the department's budget by more than \$1 million annually.

The leader demanded high performance, expecting her teams to keep up with the workflow, but she also empowered the team members to make decisions on everyday work. She engaged them in planning and balancing their time and resources to get their daily workload done. She encouraged them to connect with their customers and deliver what the customers needed and wanted. Over time, they reduced staffing while actually improving customer service. After accomplishing that dramatic reduction in staff without a single involuntary departure, the department ran well for a while. And in addition to the great results in reducing overall cost for the business, employee satisfaction increased too. It was a great place to work.

And then the economy tanked.

The company started the process of staff reductions, but this time they planned the "cut off your arm to lose weight" layoff. You know, the one where every department cuts the same percentage of people all at once, with the secret list of victims that's vetted by the leaders and their Human Resources partners and then announced in those "some of you go to this room and everyone else goes to that room" meetings. Yikes.

But when the divisional leadership asked for the cuts from her department, the leader had a different response. She was concerned about her staff, but she was also confident in her numbers. She explained, "We're already efficient. We've cut more than 40% of our staff over the last two years while maintaining the same volume. We have time study data-based models showing that if we cut more staff now, we'll immediately have to do overtime to compensate. That will just increase our costs by 50% over anything we saved!" Overtime work, of course, results in a 1.5x labor rate per hour for hourly workers.

The leader also told her boss, "But actually, with the current processes and controls we've put in place to engage the team, there's one person we don't need."

"Who's that?" he asked.

"Me."

There were no cuts from that department. Everyone stayed, including the leader. By demanding excellence and expecting efficiency from her team, she had saved them all.

When you implement Lean to create a purposeful culture of engagement, your Lean Culture will become a sustainable source of exceptional results:

Lean Culture means empowerment.

Lean Culture means better value for the customer.

Lean Culture means better performance for the organization.

Lean Culture means a more engaging, rewarding, and yes, even joyful role for each employee.

And Lean Culture provides the competitive advantages that a team needs to survive and grow.

We call the approach Lean Engaged Team Performance (Lean ETP), and it's much more than just streamlining processes. It's a purposeful combination of value innovation, process excellence, performance measures, team goals, collaborative norms, organizational structure, enabling technology, and most of all, visionary leadership. It's hard to achieve and even harder to sustain, but it's worth the journey!

Introduction: Lean Culture and Engaged Team Performance

It started on the back of a napkin.

In *Building Engaged Team Performance*, we introduced the idea of combining world-class process improvement approaches such as Lean and Six Sigma with the performance improvement concepts of High-Performing Teams in a more purposeful way. We illustrated the approach through a 2006 case study that started as a good Lean Six Sigma project and ended in a fantastically successful Lean Culture of Engaged Team Performance. The back-of-the-napkin math showed an unbelievably high opportunity for the Group Proposal Services (GPS) department at Principal Financial, which the team then actualized through a purposeful combination of process and culture.

That was the point where we realized we were on to something, but over time we learned that we needed greater emphasis on one simple ingredient: the *criticality of leadership* in creating an intentional culture of excellence.

For 10 years we have replicated that effort and led similar initiatives in other places, and we have seen a variety of outcomes; almost all were good but only some were sustainably excellent. Somewhat predictably, the key differentiator was visionary leadership: a leader who decided to create a *culture* of excellence rather than trying to simply achieve fleeting *process* excellence. While many, many companies have deployed Lean in some form, most have failed to achieve the cultural benefits that Toyota achieved when James Womack and Daniel Jones described them in their groundbreaking book, *Lean Thinking*. Many deployments have been project based and process focused without leading to a sustainable breakthrough in culture.

In 2007, *Industry Week* conducted a market survey of Lean and claimed that only 2% of responding companies believed that their Lean program was achieving its intended results. The article, entitled “Everybody’s Jumping on the Lean Bandwagon, But Many Are Being Taken for a Ride,”

exposed a lack of progress that seemed to be mostly cultural (http://www.industryweek.com/articles/everybodys_jumping_on_the_lean_bandwagon_but_many_are_being_taken_for_a_ride_15881.aspx). The Lean process hadn't failed, but the companies had never achieved a Lean Culture. The author, Rick Pay, said:

Through my experience consulting with a variety of companies implementing Lean, I've learned there are [some] major reasons that companies fail to achieve benefits:

- 1. Senior management is not committed to and/or doesn't understand the real impact of Lean.*
 - 2. Senior management is unwilling to accept that cultural change is often required for Lean to be a success.*
 - 3. The company lacks the right people in the right positions.*
-

Quite obviously, all of the above failure modes are leadership responsibilities.

Confirming the *Industry Week* research in "Why Lean Programs Fail," Jeffrey Liker and Mike Rother cited research from the Shingo Prize committee, a leading source for evaluating the success of Lean programs, which recently surveyed past winners of their elite award and found that many had failed to sustain the processes that had enabled them to win. The survey resulted in some substantial changes to their award criteria to focus on longer-term results (<http://www.lean.org/Search/Documents/352.pdf>).

Of course, most purveyors of Lean recognize the cultural components and have attempted to integrate activities that help the culture grow. Often those look like training: simulation-based events for executives, yellow belt training in Lean Six Sigma for project participants, green belt certification requirements for leaders, and web-based modules to orient all employees in the process improvement tools. While these training components are key communication and development tools that create knowledge and capability in the team, culture transformation is much more than communication.

Sheep Dip Training Doesn't Change Culture!

As we'll see as we proceed, culture change comes from purposefully changing everything together—processes, customer focus, collaborative norms, measures, organization, goals, technology, skill, capabilities, and most of all, leadership. Training is a part of that effort, but it's only an enabler of a greater strategy. That greater strategy is illustrated in Figure 1.

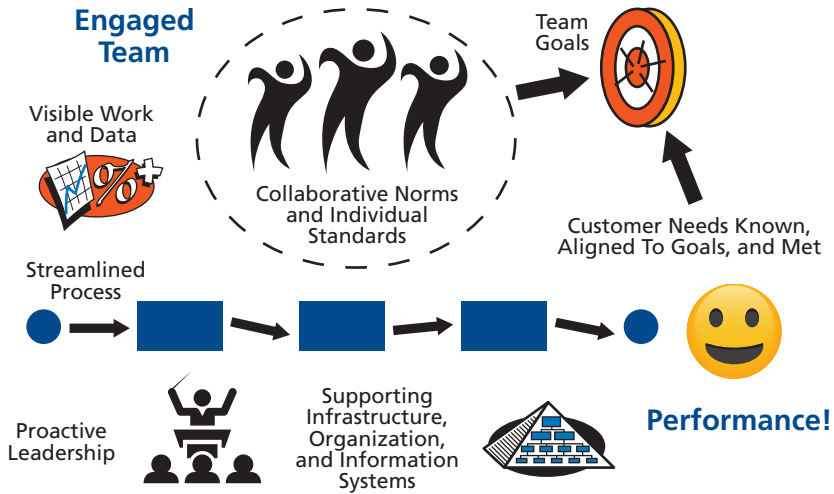


Figure 1 A Lean Culture of Engaged Team Performance.

A Lean Culture of Engaged Team Performance aligns processes, measures, goals, norms, standards, and organization with customer needs. In order to attain and sustain that alignment, you have to be willing to purposefully change all of those things in concert.

The Joy of Lean will highlight the differences between good Lean Process and great Lean Culture, illustrating how Lean done right can lead to a powerful competitive advantage. As Peter Drucker famously said, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast."

A SHORT HISTORY OF PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Lean has already proven itself to be a world-changing business philosophy. Developed by Toyota over the greater part of a century, popularized by consultants such as Womack and Jones in the last three decades, and then integrated with Six Sigma in the last 15 years, the approach is credited with savings in the billions of dollars at many individual companies. The total savings across the globe could approach the size of the economies of some industrialized nations.

It's not necessary to go into a full lesson on the principles and history of Lean here.* Suffice it to say that almost everyone has seen evidence of the gains that the Lean approach has brought, either in media examples or within their own organizations.

We'll cover many of the Lean concepts as we go through the steps to transform an organization toward a Lean Culture. But we will ask you to do something now: go run a quick Internet search on Lean. You'll find many websites and articles about "elimination of waste" (starting with a really good one from the Lean Enterprise Institute that Jim Womack founded), as well as other information about the ways that the Lean tools and principles have evolved from their roots in operational tactics to focus more on non-manufacturing "transactional and service" processes today. But not one of them starts with a truly holistic description of a Lean Culture of Engaged Team Performance.

Wikipedia, while not necessarily the most reputable source for academic research, is probably the most-used quick reference tool today, and the Wikipedia page on Lean (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lean_manufacturing) somewhat unwittingly summarizes the problem for us pretty clearly:

For many, Lean is the set of "tools" that assist in the identification and steady elimination of waste.

Elimination of waste is the core theme of Lean and the root source of its name, of course. And the eight wastes we're seeking to remove are a fairly well-known and comprehensive list of opportunities that came from manufacturing but now have been applied to every kind of organization:

- Transportation – Moving people, products, or information from one location to another
- Inventory – Storing products or documentation; backlog of work in process
- Motion – Movement within a work cell; movement of a mouse inside a computer
- Waiting – Waiting for parts, information, instructions, tools, tasks, or work to arrive
- Over-production – Making more than is required by the customer
- Over-processing – Doing more work or effort than the customer requires

* See Appendix A for a more complete history of process improvement, Lean, Six Sigma, Quality, and High-Performing Teams, adapted from Chapter 2 of Building Engaged Team Performance.

- Defects – Errors, rework, scrap, or incorrect documentation
- Skills – Under-utilized human capabilities

Nevertheless, while it's true that Lean tools help organizations eliminate waste, those tools don't on their own share a vision, create a culture of teamwork and collaboration, or even sustain their own gains. Of course, the consulting companies promoting the focus on process improvement know about Toyota's strong employee engagement and the other benefits of their corporate culture of excellence, but the approach to Lean that's been spread across the world has simply emphasized process improvement instead of striking the right balance between process streamlining and team performance improvement.

We would like to nominate a ninth waste: *Failure to sustain elimination of the other eight wastes by ingraining Lean into a Culture of Engaged Team Performance!*

Although it's not always discussed in the same breath as Lean, a culture of employee engagement has become the Holy Grail of human resources programs the world over, and we have all heard of companies such as Southwest Airlines and Zappos.com that leverage their cultures to dominate their industry niches. Likewise, some of those may be missing the process and waste elimination tools that Lean would provide.

Most organizations today have strategic goals with some kind of objective for engaging their employees. But when we look deeper at companies that are trying to further those goals, we sometimes don't see a Southwest or a Zappos.com in the making. Instead of an organization designed around its culture, we often see an employee engagement "program" or initiative. Engagement should be a way of life, not a program.

You have to design your organization purposefully to foster engagement, and we will demonstrate that Lean can become a vehicle for engaging employees in transforming their processes and their culture.

PURPOSEFUL CULTURE DESIGN

Menlo Innovations, a software company, is a great example of a culture completely designed for its organization. Described by CEO Rich Sheridan in his 2013 book, *Joy, Inc.*, Menlo embodies the vision of an engaged team, which Sheridan describes as "joyful" in terms of the products they deliver for customers.

Joy is designing and building something that actually sees the light of day and is enjoyably used and widely adopted by the people for whom it was intended... Our mission, which we take very seriously, is to "end human suffering in the world as it relates to technology."

Menlo is completely Lean, with an amazing culture intentionally built from the ground up. I've worked with Sheridan on presenting our approaches together at conferences, and I've been to the Menlo Innovations facility in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The place is amazing. As far as I've seen, Menlo is unique, but as we proceed in later chapters, we'll compare Menlo's approach and culture to an evolved form that incorporates Agile Development and Lean Engaged Team Performance, combined and tailored perfectly for a software development environment.*

The key enabler of the culture at Menlo was the fact that the founders designed their processes, measures, collaborative norms, and culture into the company from the very beginning. Many organizations today have to change a culture that already exists.

As Sheridan says, "Getting to simple is almost never easy."

ENGAGEMENT DEFINED

While Sheridan extolls the *business value of joy*, the opposite effect could be called the *cost of poor culture*. Although the full impact of poor culture may not be easy to measure precisely, you can probably tell which way it's moving, and you can probably identify engagement (or lack thereof) when you see it.

Christopher Mulligan, CEO of TalentKeepers, Inc., defines an engaged employee as "one who freely gives discretionary effort" and finds that engaged employees are easier to retain. Based on data found in their annual survey, Mulligan says, "People do care about money, but we find that it takes 20% more pay to get an engaged employee to leave, rather than 5% for everyone else."

Rachelle Gagnon of Assumption Life, the second-largest mutual insurance company in Canada, adds, "Engagement is a combination of three things: what employees *say*, whether employees *stay*, and how employees *strive*." She defines *striving* as the employees' willingness to apply discretionary effort for the benefit of the organization.

Employee engagement and employee appeasement are not the same thing. We've all seen the human resources engagement programs that listen to employee ideas without really enabling employees to change their own processes, then give away gift cards or award parking spaces to the employee of the month. While those efforts are certainly well-intentioned and can deliver some incremental value, they don't drive sustainable engagement. They simply recognize or reward the subset of employees who are *already* engaged.

* See Appendix B for a description of Agile that highlights Menlo Innovations' unique approach, which combines Lean and team engagement principles in a product development environment.

A friend of mine, who'll stay unnamed for her own protection, experienced that at her company, too:

We went through a phase where empowerment was the new thing. We had been a very top-down culture where only a few people at the top made decisions. Now managers were telling people they were empowered, but they weren't given parameters for making decisions. Very quickly, empowerment became a joke.

I see Lean as real empowerment. When I work with leaders to set up a Lean event, I tell them we should set clear parameters for the group to make decisions, so the leader should be able to go away and come back for the report out(s) and be okay with the outcomes. Then the group is empowered to remove waste and create a process that works without having to run every suggestion up the chain of command. They feel they own the outcomes, and they are proud of their accomplishments. Once their ideas have been implemented, they can point to tangible outcomes and say, "We did that!"

David Marquet expands upon my friend's profound assertion in his wonderful book on leadership, *Turn the Ship Around!*

"The problem with empowerment programs is that they contain an inherent contradiction between the message and the method. While the message is 'empowerment,' the method—it takes me to empower you—fundamentally disempowers employees." The cultural problem is just as challenging for leaders as it is for employees, he explains. "A recent survey reported that 44 percent of business leaders reported their disappointment in the performance results of their employees. This vexation within both parties in the workplace has one root cause: our present leadership model, which is a painfully outdated one."

Marquet demonstrates how leaders must intentionally create an empowered culture by turning their followers into leaders, and he shows how that is possible only by returning both authority and accountability to them.

Engagement certainly doesn't come from rewards. And while recognition is an important driver in employee satisfaction, it, too, is only part of the puzzle; in order to be recognized, the employee first has to do something good. A leadership model where "it takes me to recognize you" could be disempowering as well, so modern behavioral safety programs, for example, allow *anyone* to recognize *anyone else*. Marquet clarifies:

"Recognizing helpful behavior is a necessary function of leadership, and it's a slightly different take than recognizing people. Recognizing behavior is useful and doesn't contain the inherent contradiction that the typical 'empowerment' speech contains. People feel valued when they have the ability to contribute something positive that someone else notices."

Engagement happens when *everyone* on the team *wants* to do something good and feels truly *empowered* to do those good things all the time. By letting people participate in positive change, Lean can become a vehicle for transferring the ownership for engagement from leaders to employees, and that will drive the discretionary effort that Christopher Mulligan and Rachelle Gagnon were talking about. And as we'll continue to demonstrate, great engagement thrives with great leadership.

THE POWER OF TEAMS

We find that engagement most often coincides with membership in a great team. People will do things for their teams that they wouldn't do for themselves. On a great team, everyone cares about each other. Everyone understands the organization's purpose and buys in to the vision.

There are certainly many great team moments in sports history, and the competition and nationalism surrounding the Olympics can set the stage for greatness. While everyone probably has a favorite "miracle moment" from hockey or basketball, one of the best examples of teamwork comes from a sport where the team might not be such an obvious component: gymnastics.

In the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics, the U.S. Women's Gymnastics team was leading late in the competition, with two gymnasts left to compete on the vault. Vaulting is a strenuous and difficult individual exercise; the competitor has to run toward the apparatus, hit a handspring into a springboard, flip to push off with her hands on the vault, and then

complete a combination of flips, turns, and spins to land on her feet on a pad on the other side. Each gymnast gets two vault attempts.

The U.S. gymnasts were among the best in the world, and they were expected to seal the victory. Kerri Strug, the last U.S. competitor, was left to clean up the round after her teammate fell twice. Kerri's first vault was a disaster. Not only did she fall, but she landed awkwardly and stood up to find out she had damaged her ankle.

She knew she was badly hurt, and she asked her coach, the legendary Bela Karolyi, "Do we need this?" He told her that they needed her to go one more time. She limped back to the starting line, encouraged by her coach and team.

She would later learn that the ankle was severely sprained with tendon damage. After seeing her limp back to the line, nobody is sure to this day how she was able to attempt the next vault, working up to a full run, and nobody is sure how she landed that next vault on one foot. I'm confident it's not something she had ever practiced, and I'd bet you'll never see it again in an Olympic competition. Take a look at the video clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZRYiOa5lM8>.

The U.S. team won the gold medal and ironically didn't even need Strug's vault to win, after another country's gymnast later made some errors on a floor exercise. But Strug and her team thought she needed that attempt at the time, and she landed a miracle vault on one leg when she probably should have just withdrawn from the competition.

Strug then collapsed to the floor and had to be carried to the medal ceremony. She withdrew from the individual events later in the week, giving her spot to another team member. And she returned home with her only medal from that Olympics, a team gold. She had won a team bronze medal four years before in Barcelona, and to this day she's one of the best U.S. gymnasts to have never won an individual medal in international competition.

The lesson: People will do things for their teams that they wouldn't think of attempting to do for themselves.

Organizations work best when individuals identify with their teams and have a team goal of winning. Team members feel confident that the team will support them, and in return they give their best efforts, putting the team's goals ahead of their own.

In a world that increasingly celebrates individual successes, the power of a great team can get lost in translation. Whether a herd of antelope, gymnasts, or insurance quote producers, a good team can nurture and protect the individuals within it.

THE GRAND PARADOX OF AN EFFICIENT CULTURE

Efficiency gains are becoming more and more expected nowadays. As technology and process improvement techniques proliferate across the globe, efficient work is counterbalancing the benefits of cheaper labor. Believe it or not, off-shoring labor to other countries isn't quite as productive as it used to be. All organizations are becoming better at doing more with less.

Think about how it might feel to implement efficiency improvements, particularly the kinds that impact organizational design and jobs. While these kinds of projects can produce astounding results on the business side, we also know there's often an underlying fear that those efficiency improvements might hurt people by putting them out of work.

But that's not really how it has to happen.

First of all, efficiency improvement shouldn't necessarily mean reduction in staffing. Quite often the organization can find a way to use the additional capacity to drive growth. In the past when we found opportunities to cut costs by reducing staff, almost every one of those situations was handled through attrition. The vast majority of those companies consolidated open positions or moved people to other roles without a layoff; the few exceptions to this approach addressed known performance issues of specific individuals. Leaders saw the value of accomplishing those changes in a positive way so that they didn't prevent the next round of changes in the future. They didn't want to create fear of change. So while we can't promise that all future staff reductions will be handled perfectly, our history has shown that positive changes are more sustainable than negative ones.

More importantly, though, there are lots of positive implications for employees when organizations become more efficient. A number of positive benefits of Lean Engaged Team Performance boost team morale, including greater ownership and "line of sight" from their work to the customer. Most of all we know that greater efficiency vastly improves job security. Just as the insurance quoting parable in the Prologue illustrated, an efficient team is easier to protect because it pays for itself.

The Grand Paradox of an Efficient Culture is that improving processes and performance can result in humanely accomplished attrition and slower hiring in the short term, while efficiency will drive greater job security for everyone in the long term. That's all good. And so even though employees sometimes feel a little bit of fear and loathing when we start a Lean transformation, we find that they have much higher job satisfaction, morale, and job security in the end.

In a recent article, "How Going Lean Saved These Companies" (thebusinesspost.ca, 2015), Bob Tetford, the general manager and co-owner of Restwell Mattresses, credited Lean with saving the Canadian company.

They have done two waves of Lean transformation, redesigning their work together with their employees. Tetford explained:

Did we make a pile of money after that? No, but it has allowed us to survive. There has been a tremendous amount of change. Wages have at least doubled since we started this transformation... If we had stayed the way we were, we wouldn't be here now, not even close.

LEAN CULTURE BY THE STEPS

This will sound like a circular argument, but the best way to integrate Lean process tools with Lean Culture is to simply engage all of the people in the organization in the transformation!

The steps to achieve a transformation to a Lean Culture of Engaged Team Performance are the same ones we outlined in *Building Engaged Team Performance* almost a decade ago:

1. *Commit to change.* Find your inspirational purpose and build a platform for change.
2. *Measure and analyze the process.* Investigate the current process and customer requirements, and measure outcomes and work standards.
3. *Streamline the work.* Improve the flow of the process to deliver value efficiently.
4. *Make the work and data visible.* Make the new work processes, collaborative norms, and control measures visually obvious in the workplace.
5. *Organize the team.* Reorganize and right-size the team for the work.
6. *Set team goals.* Assess team performance and establish team goals.
7. *Lead the transition.* Visionary leadership must invest in the culture, developing the skills, tools, systems, and knowledge to move the team to the envisioned future state.
8. *Sustain Engaged Team Performance.* Demonstrate performance over time.

A leader of a small team can use this transformational approach, or a CEO can deploy it across her entire organization. *The key is to get the entire team to participate in the transformation.*

Regardless of the scale of the change, it's critically important to communicate the approach transparently and to engage the entire organization in following the steps together. The whole team needs to understand where they are heading and why the journey is so important.

LEAN LEADERSHIP

We'll end each chapter with ideas about leadership and questions that highlight the opportunities that leaders will need to find in order to lead differently.

In her book, *Mindset*, Carol Dweck differentiates the two types of mental outlook that lead to vastly different results in business, education, and relationships. She explains that *fixed-mindset* people see their own and others' potential as mostly a function of innate talent that they don't control, while *growth-mindset* people believe that any skill can be learned or improved. While that concept sounds obvious, ask yourself if you're a great leader, artist, salesperson, and mathematician. Most people who are not named Leonardo da Vinci will invariably say that they're not good at one of those. But Dweck presents evidence that all of those skills can be learned. If you believe her thesis, it won't surprise you to hear that Leonardo da Vinci's greatest talent was probably not one of the above skills, but the passion for learning new things.

Why do we bring up that concept now? First, if you haven't read *Mindset* you probably should. That book changed the way I talk to my children even before I had finished reading it. If you intend to finish reading *this* book now and save that one for later, you need to accept the premise that *you can improve your ability to transform, lead, and sustain a culture of excellence*. If you're willing to believe that, please read on.

Here are a few questions to help you start the journey:

1. Has your organization tried Lean yet? If so, compare your approach and your results. Are you just removing waste from the process or trying to revolutionize your culture? Are you optimizing or sub-optimizing your deployment?
2. Do you see joy at work? What would be the *business value of joy* for your organization?
3. Do you need to change your culture? If so, do you really *want* to change?

As we proceed, we'll highlight the steps in transforming your organization to a Lean Culture of Engaged Team Performance, and we'll illustrate those steps both with personal stories and business examples. You'll see that a Lean Culture isn't so impossible to achieve, as long as you set out to do it purposefully.

1

Find Your Purpose: Commit to Change

In late 2014, Jana Schmidt took the reigns as CEO of Ecova Inc., a leader in energy management services. Her charge was clear: build a company capable of meeting very ambitious financial goals year after year.

Luckily, in her previous role as leader of Sales and Operations for the company, Schmidt had already launched an organizational transformation including implementation of Lean Engaged Team Performance initiatives in some key divisions (we'll explain more of the details of those efforts as we proceed). But even as the team was heading in the right direction and some results were already coming in, she knew that there was more work to do.

Schmidt explains:

When I joined Ecova, I was immediately attracted to the entrepreneurial spirit and the way the team would rise up to solve any challenge that came our way. But what I also saw was a lot of fire-fighting and dealing with issues that were created by solving problems in a one-off manner, rather than getting to the root cause and improving the process forever. For a young growth company, the self-discipline of engaged team performance and a commitment to process improvement do not initially sound too joyful. But all we needed was one team to try. And when that team went through the process, a key leader exclaimed that she had come to realize that we could not have built the process in a worse way. The pain her team was feeling became more clear when the end-to-end processes were mapped out.

In her first month as CEO, she convened a transformative discussion to align the company's strategy with its financial plan, engaging all mid-level and senior leaders in assessment of the current initiatives and reprioritization of projects. Some key executives' projects were cancelled, and other new efforts were fast-tracked to launch early the next year. In a single month, they turned their priorities on a dime.

They invested in employee-led projects called "Cost Action Teams" to cut costs, trained leaders in continuous process improvement techniques called "Kaizen," and held leaders accountable for finishing ongoing implementations of "Lean Engaged Team Performance" efforts in operational areas, all the while maintaining their ongoing investments in client service improvement and international growth.

Every person in the organization was somehow involved in the changes that occurred.

Schmidt articulates her vision for Ecova's culture:

We want to create a culture where employees can thrive in line with our values of collaboration, agility, responsibility, and passion. Our employees love energy and sustainability and want to be the best at driving down cost and consumption, and doing that in a consistent, repeatable, and high quality way enables Ecova team members to focus on consulting with clients vs. fixing problems.

Consequently, in 2015 Schmidt's team achieved their ambitious financial plan, positioning the company for an international growth push the next year. We'll return to this story over the following chapters to share more detail on how they actually accomplished these changes.

WHY CHANGE? WHY NOT!

As the famous line from a rehabilitation program goes, "The first step is admitting you have a problem." But what if you don't really have a problem?

Not everyone has a clear mandate for change, or perhaps a previous rationale for change has dissipated now that things have started going better. You shouldn't have to find your back to a wall before deciding that you want to change.

Clearly aligning your purpose with your organization's customers can help build commitment for change when there isn't yet a burning platform.

“The height of success is when you break your business, that is what I say! Just when you think things are really really going well, that’s the time to change,” said Ed Zander, former CEO of Motorola, in 2006. And then Motorola rode the RAZR into the ground as Apple, Palm, RIM, and others reinvented the phone.

The hardest decision to change may come when your business is also your personal brand. In order to change, you have to lose everything. Consider a musician...

Darius Rucker reinvented himself in 2008. At one time the front-man of the rock band Hootie and the Blowfish and then off to a new adventure as a country singer, Rucker found that the cue for his transformation was simply in following his passion for music. He won the 2009 Country Music Association (CMA) New Artist of the Year award, and his cover of “Wagon Wheel” in 2013 took him to the pinnacle of his new genre. Fittingly, “Wagon Wheel” is about a man hitchhiking south to Raleigh, North Carolina, to start a new life. In early 2014, Rucker won the Grammy Award for Best Country Solo Performance at the 56th Annual Grammy Awards.

Rucker’s reinvention as a country music artist carried some considerable risk, of course. Rucker’s Grammy win makes him only the second African American (the other was Charley Pride) to win a vocal performance Grammy award in a country music category

Change is not just for musicians! If Hootie can change, why can’t we? (By the way, most people don’t know that Rucker didn’t really go by the name ‘Hootie’—the band was named for two other people.)

FIRST, FIND YOUR PURPOSE

The mandate of being a new CEO is a strong reason for change, but not everyone has that kind of opportunity for clarity, and the rationale for change can dissipate (“when things are really really going well,” as Ed Zander said above) as the burning platform’s flames die out and become embers over time. And a financial goal may not translate into a shared vision for all employees. You don’t need a burning platform if you can find an inspirational purpose.

First you have to find your purpose. We could mean that on many levels, of course, from a personal purpose to an organizational one. The combination of those purposes has come to be called a North Star, which Prasad Kaipa describes as *the highest aspiration that ignites both my natural genius and that of my organization*. People crave that kind of aligned purpose, and great leaders find a way to inspire a common purpose in every person in their organizations. We find that the best purpose is connected to a customer need rather than an internal aspiration.

Some organizations have a clearer purpose than others. Drew Locher, author of *Lean Office and Service Simplified*, says in a recent newsletter that there has to be an *inspirational purpose*:

How can an organization connect with not just the 'hands' of its associates—their physical abilities—but their 'heads and hearts,' their ideas for improvement of the business? Consider volunteer organizations. Why would an individual contribute uncompensated time...? How can that same spirit be translated to for-profit, for-pay organizations? Most importantly, such organizations have an inspirational purpose that volunteers share.

A non-profit called Joppa serves the homeless community in Des Moines, Iowa, helping with food, clothing, and fuel in the cold winters, all while trying to enable homeless people to get into more sustainable solutions for permanent housing. Their mission sounds like something important that everyone could support:

To create a community of unconditional love, support and hope for the homeless, as we work together to end homelessness in Central Iowa.

A purpose can't be any clearer than Joppa's; Joppa helps homeless people survive, get into housing, and rebuild their lives.

On the other hand, a financially-focused business purpose might not ring so clearly as a call to action for your teams:

To create a consistent trend of earnings and volume growth so that our stock price will go up, and we can eventually be acquired by a bigger company so that our executives and shareholders can make a shipload of money.

That one probably won't motivate most of the team to go above and beyond the call of duty.

While making money may be some of the reason that your organization is in business, of course, a closer connection to your customers may help you find your real purpose. Employees feel a greater connection to their

work when they have a better understanding of customers' needs and expectations, and when they know the score of the game, both from an external (customer) and internal (financial) standpoint. They aren't quite as motivated, however, to "beat the competition" or "meet our financial plan" as they are to "change the world" for customers.

The business that I lead certainly needs to provide a living for our team members in order to sustain itself, but we also see a greater purpose:

Implementation Partners LLC exists to inspire every leader to transform the cultures of their organizations and deliver exceptional business results by developing efficient and effective processes and giving every employee a chance to contribute their best work on an engaged, sustainable, winning team.

We want to change the world to make it more efficient and effective, which will lift everyone's standard of living while creating rewarding, valued roles for every employee. That feels like an important purpose to our team members.

Roche, the medical device and pharmaceutical company, has posted a strong purpose statement on its website:

Doing now what patients need next

We believe it's urgent to deliver medical solutions right now—even as we develop innovations for the future. We are passionate about transforming patients' lives. We are courageous in both decision and action. And we believe that good business means a better world.

That is why we come to work each day. We commit ourselves to scientific rigor, unassailable ethics, and access to medical innovations for all. We do this today to build a better tomorrow.

We are proud of who we are, what we do, and how we do it. We are many, working as one across functions, across companies, and across the world.

We are Roche.

And there's not a word there about beating competitors or making money.

Regardless of what words you choose, however, the most important thing about a mission or a purpose statement is to develop it *together*. Whether the words ring perfectly true or not, the employees of an organization won't want to see them brought down from a mountain by the leadership team and presented with the words already etched into stone tablets. That's only worked once in history. Find a way to engage your whole team in the writing and revision process, and refresh it occasionally.

A VISION OF PERFECTION

One tool that we find quite useful to engage a whole team in a Lean transformation effort is a "Vision of Perfection" discussion. We haven't seen that one described in other books or materials, but it's so simple that it seems impossible that we invented it. Nevertheless, we find that it's a very effective way to lead a powerful conversation to define "perfect" before we assess the current state. Then as the employee teams work together to measure and analyze their processes in the next phase, they're able to compare their current performance to the Vision of Perfection they had originally derived.

The activity is easy to facilitate. We just create a set of flipcharts with two sections, and then we ask a representative group of leaders and employees on the transformation team to describe their view of the perfect (1) customer outcomes, process, and technology, and (2) culture of teamwork and performance.

Regardless of what kind of company, department, or business we lead through the discussion, the conversation typically yields uncannily similar results. Amazingly, people who've never heard of Lean end up listing principles that eliminate Lean's classic wastes, as well as the key principles of Engaged Team Performance. We believe that most teams derive the same list because Lean and ETP principles are mostly common sense.

For example, Figure 2 is a Vision of Perfection list that a team made in about 45 minutes, without any prior training in Lean or other business improvement methods.

Identifying your purpose, mission, and definition of perfection can and should produce some angst, as people discuss lofty principles and goals and then compare them to the current state. Don't let that discourage your team; be sure to connect that discussion to finding opportunities for change. Remember, our first step here is to *Commit to Change*; we're supposed to be creating angst at this point. But also understand that people will have strong feelings about the amount of opportunity you find as you begin to look at their organizations and work through a Lean lens.

Client Outcomes, Process, and Technology	Teamwork and Performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Zero errors – Eliminate shut-offs and late fees (defects) • High savings impact for clients • No duplication of roles or work • Do it right the first time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Eliminate errors and rework – Quality control / peer review • One touch & done • 100% ownership • End-to-end view of the work • Scalable capacity to demand • Automated technology • Get work done immediately to minimize follow-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfect alignment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Everyone understands process, the client, and vertical client industry • Consistency among team • Common goal as a team • Team measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Visual measures in the workplace – Aligned with goals – Matching accountabilities • Strong communication • Workforce engagement • Collaborative norms • Responsible, accountable, and allowed to do the right thing • Self-disciplined

Figure 2 Data management team's definition of *perfect*.

Once upon a time, right after the kickoff meeting for a new transformational change effort, we were having a hallway conversation with a leader of the business area that was about to go through the transformation, and the leader started with the words, "I hope we don't find too much opportunity..."

The company had implemented a similar project recently in another department, and that effort had found a substantial (over 40%) opportunity to improve performance and labor efficiency.

Knowing that didn't sound quite right, she stopped herself mid-sentence and started over, "I want to find lots of opportunity, of course. But not *too* much." She stopped again.

"I mean... I want to find as much as we can, just not so much that it embarrasses us..."

"You know what I mean," she said with a wry grin.

We knew what she meant.

THE FROZEN MIDDLE

Hardly anyone likes change. Change is scary. It requires learning new skills and exchanging the comfort of past experience for the risk of a new way of doing things. Even those who embrace change in their personal lives will often still resist it at work.

We often encounter some of that resistance as we lead Lean Engaged Team Performance transformations, of course, and we're sure you see it every day too. But while the perception may be that front-line employees could have the most to lose in organizational change efforts (for example, because they will have to learn new skills or face major changes in their roles), we usually see the worst resistance from the most unlikely of participants: mid-to-senior level leaders. We sometimes call that group the Frozen Middle.

But when you look at the reasons for that resistance, it starts to make sense. Leaders are the most likely to feel a sense of ownership of the existing process, particularly if they have presided over it for a while. They may have designed the existing process and feel that a suggestion for change is an indictment of their past leadership. They worry what others will think. They see themselves as problem-solvers, and it hurts them to find problems that they had perhaps missed seeing in the past.

Regardless, in every change effort there comes a "make or break" moment for each leader where he or she has an opportunity to change or be changed.

A MOMENT OF TRUTH

We had one of those moments with a leader at Ecova as Jana Schmidt's organization began its transformation.

Jennifer Wilson's Utility Expense Management team had just finished a six-week time study, and not an easy one. More than 300 people participated, tracking all of their work every day with to-the-minute precision on each task. Leaders had reviewed the tracking spreadsheets every night, providing feedback to the team members. We were finally ready to look at the data.

Process analysis identified a number of opportunities to consolidate handoffs, prevent non-value-added work, reduce waiting time, and improve quality by reducing data entry errors. The team identified that the diverse functional roles were dispersing accountability and delaying service to clients, while also inhibiting the kind of collaboration that could allow sharing of tasks so that teams could more efficiently overcome daily variation in the various types of incoming work.

Additionally, performance analysis showed that some of the teams were right-staffed, while a few of the larger functions were over-staffed. The total opportunity was more than 10%, which of course was a significant value to a business that size.

We have shown similar numbers to leaders at other companies in the past and have sometimes seen "aversive" behaviors (questioning the data collection methods in ever-greater detail, and then resisting the

opportunity to even pilot new ideas). We were pretty sure Wilson would be supportive, but even though we know the leaders pretty well by the time we get to this part of the project, we're never quite sure how they will react when the data hit home.

The moment of truth came. Wilson listened to the data, asked a few questions, and was ready to give us her impression...

"This is so cool!"

When you see an opportunity to change, how will you react?

IT TAKES LEADERSHIP

More than any other tool or concept, a Lean Culture Transformation requires leadership. The senior leader has to commit to change and then share the vision with his or her whole team.

I attended a Lean Six Sigma conference more than ten years ago and had a chance to listen to former General Electric CEO Jack Welch speak and answer questions. During the question session, one person asked Jack, "I'm running a grass-roots Lean Six Sigma effort, trying to get some projects done to show our leadership team the results, and hopefully get them to support a greater investment in continuous improvement over time. Can you please give me some advice on how to best deal with that?"

Jack said, "Find a new job. Next question."

She paused to see if he would say anything more, but then grabbed the microphone again before another person could start a new question, "Seriously, Jack. I'm a mid-level leader in a larger company and I can't get the senior leadership team on board yet. But I don't have the luxury of quitting."

He replied, "Seriously, you need to find a new job. Leaders who don't want to lead change will eventually kill your company. You might as well get out now."

He went on to the next question.

I felt bad for her. My advice would have been to try to do something positive first: try to change your organization for the better by deploying Lean in the area you do control, showing results that will get senior leaders' attention, and seeing if you can get other leaders on board. Sometimes good leaders just need to be shown the value of thinking in a new way, and you probably owe it to them to give them a chance. Then if they see the results and still don't want to change, that's the time to start looking for a new company.

MOVING FORWARD WITH A PURPOSE

As Rich Sheridan explains in *Joy, Inc.*, his purpose can be described in only one word...

I now know what I want in business: joy. A pursuit of joy within a business context is not about the pursuit of fame or profit. Humans aspire to a higher purpose. Teams desire to work on goals bigger than themselves. They want to have a lasting and valued effect on the world. They want to make their mark, not for the glory, but for the purpose of bringing delight or ending suffering. Like the Wright brothers, we at Menlo want to fly. We've found that profit, fame, and glory often follow us on this path.

Every team member at Menlo Innovations can articulate that same purpose.

LEADERSHIP WITH A PURPOSE

In order to move on from here, you have to complete Step 1, *Find Your Purpose: Commit to Change*. We're not saying that it will be easy, but you have to find an inspirational purpose that can light a burning platform for building a Lean Culture and then begin to engage your team in developing, refining, and sharing that purpose across your organization.

Here are some questions to start your journey:

1. Do you really need to change your culture, or can you get better results through executing on existing initiatives?
2. Does your organization have a higher, inspirational purpose that drives you? How can you get all of your team members to understand and buy in to that purpose? How can your team contribute to developing or refining it, so that they can fully buy in?
3. Do you really believe that a Lean Culture of Engaged Team Performance is possible and even desirable?
4. Can you commit to change personally (first!) and organizationally?

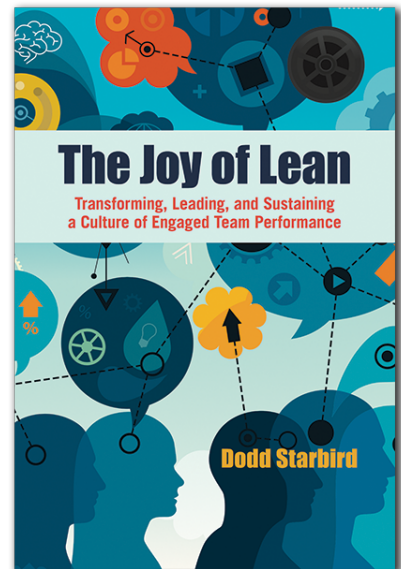
We've started this journey by discussing leadership, and we will finish with leadership at the end of the book. Not coincidentally, the key to executing the middle steps is also... leadership.

On we go.

Find *The Joy of Lean* and Start the Journey

There are four ways you can find “The Joy of Lean” online:

1. Buy a copy on Amazon.com at:
https://www.amazon.com/dp/0873899423/ref=sr_1_2
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4. Or contact me by email at the address below, and we’ll get you a signed copy.



About the author:



As the Managing Partner for Implementation Partners LLC, Dodd Starbird leads change efforts that consistently achieve exceptional results for clients. Implementation Partners exists to inspire and enable every leader to transform their organizations by giving every employee a chance to contribute their best work on an engaged, sustainable, winning team. Dodd is the author of two business books, *The Joy of Lean* (ASQ Quality Press, 2016) and *Building Engaged Team Performance* (McGraw-Hill, 2010).

Enjoy the journey!

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