

How to Get Your Lean Transformation Unstuck

Podcast 25 - Phyllis Mikolaitis

I recently attended a Continuous Improvement seminar. Over-and-over again I heard company owners and managers complain that they had a great start and enjoyed some success in implementing Lean but then they got stuck. The excitement eroded, and everyday business got in the way.

There are three main reasons that strongly impact this occurrence. I want to briefly review the first two today but focus on the third reason as it isn't often discussed. The first is the lack of commitment from the top including their commitment to include the time to perform the Lean activities. I have spoken previously about the need for commitment from the top down. It includes a commitment to not just Kaizen events but to continuous improvement as a new way of doing things. Many argued that it takes time to have a stand-up meeting at the start of the day and for management at three levels to gather and assess how they are against targets and what improvements have been made. They say they do not have time as they have work to produce and fires to put out. But discipline and commitment to creating a Lean culture will eliminate the fire drills and allow a smoother flow with more output. You must develop the skill and discipline to have the meetings but limit the scope and time to ensure they do not impact the work. I listen to my daughter who is a nurse provide an example about how she attends shift change meetings of just 15 minutes to assess the patients and their needs. So, don't give up! Work on the time and scope discipline as well as gaining the top down commitment.

The second reason is resistance to change. We all have our comfort zone. We know what works for us and what feels comfortable. I am sure you have tried to make changes in your life whether it is get more exercise, eat healthier or develop a new habit like getting up earlier. It is so easy to slip back into our comfort zone. That is why so many articles have been written on the topic and why Lean visual controls are helpful. Changing some beliefs and your mindset will help you make the changes and make them stick. But that is a topic for another day.

Let me get to the third reason which is the topic for the day.

Lean training like most training programs can include webinars, self-paced training on PC or CD and face-to-face seminars. The typical training programs do not include post-training coaching. Because management does not want to pay for the coaching element. Their vision is that employees have been trained and they are "fixed". Now it is up to them to use what they have learned to improve processes, eliminate waste and increase profits.



But do you recall hearing the statement about how little is remembered if there is no coaching or feedback. With coaching and feedback, the employee can adjust their skills and improve step by step to achieve the desired results. Sports stars, professional speakers, actors, politicians, and successful business people employ coaches. But, most leaders don't provide coaching for the people in the factory or the office.

There are two significant reasons why coaching is critical to the success of a company. First, there is no silver bullet. The individual cannot take a quick fix course and gain long-term results. It takes lots of small steps. Continually focusing on individual elements builds performance and leads to success. As the legendary and greatest coach of the twentieth century, John Wooden, explained: "You must establish a plan to develop excellence." John provided coaching and feedback to the members of his teams. He also gave them with the tools to take personal responsibility for consistently improving their skills and behavior. Second, research shows that low intensity or infrequent coaching is not effective. Coaching must become a way of operating the business. The coaching must consist of the job observation and feedback. Additional skill development can also be accomplished through the establishment of company Social Media such as blogs, training websites, YouTube postings, and Pinterest. But these activities do not replace face-to-face coaching.

Coaching is the most critical element in sustaining the positive impact of training. Drs. Srinii Pillay, M.D. and Rudolph Tanzi, PhD. of Harvard University have led ongoing studies on memory, and their research indicates that mindfulness, linkages, and repetition are vital factors in remembering. This research makes a critical point as management expects salespeople to remember and implement skills that they learn in a one to five-day program, yet they do not invest in activities associated with mindfulness, reinforcement or implementation assessment and feedback. Thus, the value of the training is quickly lost, and the money spent on training is wasted.

Management cannot succeed with Lean tools and classes alone. You must also change how you lead, think and act. Coaching is critical to your success. We have moved to a new world that includes Buyer 2.0. Therefore, you cannot manage as leaders did in Buyer 1.0 or even with tactics used before that time.

As Darren Hardy publisher of Success Magazine says, "You can't expect what you don't inspect" and "Practicing bad habits only reinforces them". Therefore, coaching to ensure you provide the quality products and services on time and at a fair price as demanded by Buyer 2.0 must be an integral part of the way you operate your business.

Coaching with a step by step process focusing on one element allows adjustment and reinforcement for successful achievement of the element. It takes repeating something



multiple times plus feedback to perform the skills successfully. Success is measured in the ability to perform to a standard and follow the correct process. You can't see yourself perform. That is why so many professional people have coaches who can observe and provide feedback.

Improvement is not a one-time thing. If you are not growing and improving, then entropy will occur. You can't just do a Lean activity when it is urgent or an emergency. Nor can you do workshops and expect everything to change. Continuous improvement occurs day by day one small step at a time.

Why was Toyota so successful in their continuous improvement programs? Kata Coaching is an integral part of the way they do business. It provides actionable routines of thought and behavior. The coaching focuses on a target condition and teaches small steps to motivate and elevate the employee's performance. Coaching creates a state of mindfulness when the employee focuses on the single element being discussed.

Kata is a Japanese word for a way of doing something. Toyota has enjoyed great success with Coaching Kata. It is a routine by which company leaders and managers teach improvement. Kata identifies the process for doing something, but it does not identify the content or steps of what you do. It is how you coach but not what you coach.

Coaching Kata content is different in every business and manufacturing function but the procedure for how you coach is the same.

So, how do you coach successfully? It begins with planning and scheduling your coaching your sessions. When you plan your coaching, you know "A" the current state of the employee performance and its results. You also know "B" the desired state and results. However, you don't know the obstacles you may encounter to get from A to B. Therefore, you plan the based on what you know and adapt as you go.

At Toyota, they have target conditions or short-term states. In Coaching Kata, the manager or supervisor focuses on getting the employee to the next improvement step in a short-term desired state. Overall achievement is made one step at a time.

It's easy to get distracted or go on tangents. This behavior can severely dilute your coaching efforts. You need to focus on one target condition at a time. Too many elements will confuse and overwhelm your employee.

A target condition should be a stretch beyond the current employee capability but not too easy or too difficult. Neither extreme will be successful. When the target is between the extremes, it will motivate the employee to achieve it. Be sure to celebrate when he or she succeeds.



Coaching in a Lean environment can be defined as helping employees achieve success through motivating, mentoring, guiding and teaching. When you coach correctly you increase employee motivation and morale. You transfer knowledge, and you allow the employee to develop their own conclusions and solve their problems or ask for help to work through them. You develop problem-solvers. However, when you coach incorrectly, you waste time and resources. You also create a negative work environment and an ineffective organization with below par results.

To achieve a successful coaching outcome, you must define the scope and the expected results for the session. You must also ensure that your expectations and interest are aligned with those of your employee. Good coaching builds trust by honoring the employee's skills and accomplishments. What is an example of incorrect coaching? Solving the problem or the employee vs helping them solve the problem does allow them to learn how to develop a solution. Also, it isn't helpful to be directive about the solution to the problem. However, you can be directive about how to approach the problem and develop a solution to it. The employee learns when he or she gains insight to develop the solution. When the employee feels that he or she solved the problem alone, it is the greatest level of achievement for both the employee and the coach.

Focus and effective listening are critical elements of a successful coaching session. Work to ensure you are filtering your comments through a neutral lens. Draw from the employee's comments or experiences to put things in context. Useful feedback is a gift. It is meant to help the employee move to the next level and achieve success.

Remember that people have different learning styles so adapt your session to the style of the employee. If the employee is visual, then draw a picture. If he or she is tactile, then provide a guided hands-on experience. If the employee is an auditory learner, then speak with descriptive but concise words. In each case, ask questions. Take time in silence for the employee to think. Then provide instructions when required.

Let me take a minute to provide some examples of incorrect coaching? Solving the problem or the employee vs helping them solve the problem does allow them to learn how to develop a solution. Also, it isn't helpful to be directive about the solution to the problem. However, you can be directive about how to approach the problem and develop a solution to it. The employee learns when he or she gains insight to develop the solution. When the employee feels that he or she solved the problem alone, it is the greatest level of achievement for both the employee and the coach.

Look on your office shelf and see the books from classes you have taken. How effective has the training been? Classroom training, even with role play or simulation exercises only achieves awareness.

So, as the coach, go to the place where the work is taking place. Observing and coaching on the job, whether it is in the plant, the office or in the field with a sales rep is the only way to produce true and lasting improvement. Also, don't be afraid that you or the employee will make a mistake. People learn from their mistakes, and they remember the experience.

Like any other skill, it takes time to become skilled and then become expert. If you search online, you will find people like motivational expert Brendan Burchard, say it takes ten thousand hours of study and practice to become expert.

Don't think; I can't wait until I complete ten thousand hours to be a successful coach. Start NOW. Every hour counts. Both you and the employee will improve and move up a step as you engage in coaching sessions.

The intention is to improve until it becomes second nature. Take heart and stick with it. With each session, the employee's performance will improve. In addition, he or she will become more able to help and coach others.

Coaches should have experience in the activity. Managers coach managers in management and Lean skills not line or field employees in tasks. Plant supervisors coach those in the manufacturing area and those with sales experience coach salespeople. Let me share an observation about Kata Coaching. Senior managers should go first and learn to use the Lean tools and how to coach using the Kata process. The responsibility for the shift in culture and improvement cannot be delegated. It begins with senior management.

Finally, each step forward benefits you, the company, the employee and ultimately society. So, dedicate yourself to working at it and you will enjoy the results.

Well, that wraps up our podcast for today. Thanks to my producer and audio engineer John Switzer, for his great work with me on today's podcast. Join me next time when I'll share more hints and tips. I appreciate your feedback so please send your questions, comments or topic suggestions to me at Phyllis@salestrainingolutions.com.

Don't forget to visit our website to get your free resources @ www.salestrainingolutions.com; look under freebies. You can also join our bimonthly newsletter and get our Free eBook on Storytelling: The Secret to Sales Success as well as Lean checklists. The link is on our website next to the podcasts and blog posts.

Watch for our FREE mini-course on Lean coming soon. As I said, it's absolutely Free and filled with tools, tips, and resources to help you achieve success.