



How to Make Your Team a Constellation of Lean Superstars

Hi, it's Phyllis Mikolaitis continuing my discussion on Lean and Continuous Improvement. It is easy to see why owners and executives get excited about implementing Lean. They learn that they can increase revenue and profits while eliminating waste. It helps the top line and the bottom line. The concepts are easily grasped, and many of the concepts are easily implemented, yet often the outcome is disappointing. Why does that happen? It is because the challenge lies not in understanding the principles but in the change in the management approach to the day-to-day business activities. It requires transforming your culture as well as the processes. There is no magic wand or silver bullet. However, the benefits to your culture change are long-term benefits.

Success depends upon getting the buy-in of everyone and changing from individuals seeking stardom into a group of connected members seeking team success. Just as a constellation is composed of many stars creating a meaningful pattern, a great team is comprised of many stars that display a meaningful pattern of success. Great coaches like John Wooden of UCLA fame and Nick Saban of the University of Alabama, praise the entire team as no one achieves success alone. Team success is not limited to sports. Forbes reports that Cisco, GE and Cleveland Clinic are a few examples of organizations that abandoned their obsolete functional structures and moved to a team-based structure. You want to create an environment that is all about the success of the team. When a team wins, the whole team deserves the praise. You don't want to create jealousy, envy, or unhealthy competition on your team. Focus on one individual lowers the morale of the team and creates distrust as well as unwillingness to share and support one another.

Great teams are tribes of connected sharing people, not lone wolves. That includes the sales team. Shawn Achor, author of *Big Potential*, says, "the key to achieving your highest potential starts by helping others achieve theirs."

When we invest in others, we reap the dividends of our investment. If you want your company to reach its highest potential, you must inspire them and enable them to achieve their highest



potential. That includes everyone in the company from the janitor or receptionist to the top executive.

Changing the culture includes praising employees when their job is well done, not just an exceptional achievement. Praise the individual for their exhibiting a characteristic or for their performance. Achor warns not to praise by comparing that person to others on the team as it diminishes everyone else and ultimately doesn't achieve your goal. Teddy Roosevelt is one of my favorite Presidents and he said, "Comparison is the thief of joy."

Achievements can be contagious, and the best form of praise is to inspire others. For example, someone commits to starting an exercise program when they see someone else who has gotten in shape because of their exercise program. Another example could be someone who signs up for a continuing education program when they observe someone else demonstrating skills learned in their class. And a team leader implementing Lean when she sees another team succeeding in their Lean quest is another example.

Research shows that when you treat your employees well and praise them for a job well done, they, in turn, are friendlier and more helpful to your customers. They also strive to continually perform at their best, to make the company a success, and they are more loyal employees. All these points are important as happy customers bring repeat business and recommend your company. Loyal employees save you 20 to 150 percent of their salary when you don't have to replace them.

I'd like to make a note here about what I have seen in manager feedback and reviews. Managers tend to highlight what to improve and not what the employee has done well. This type of feedback makes the employee focus on the negative, and they don't really hear the positive. A negative approach prevents any of the areas where they achieved success from being reinforced.

Fortunately for me, early in my management career, I attended a seminar on how to provide quality feedback. From then on, I first asked the employee to tell me what they thought they did well or what went well in our sales call. I would **not** allow them to discuss any area of improvement until they told me three good things. After I reinforced those successes, I asked them what they thought was the most important skill to improve. If I agreed, I gave them some



feedback and coaching and then pointed them to resources on the topic. If I disagreed, I acknowledged their thoughts and redirected them to the most critical skills.

I also learned in that seminar that it is essential to be authentic and to be specific. I would take lots of notes when I was doing an observation, so I could tell the employee exactly what they did or said and the effect on the customer, team, or product. I also ensured it was a valid point as the employee would see the authenticity in my face and they'd hear it in my voice. I often see former employees and students at trade shows. They tell me they remember my dedication to quality feedback and the effect it had on their career.

I felt this approach was critical to my success as praise for the achievements sparks the energy and motivation to improve the areas of weakness. It will have the same effect on your journey to Lean success. To get and keep your team moving forward applying Lean and looking for improvements, you must keep them motivated. Working toward a specific goal such as the creation of a Lean environment requires a full team effort. It can't be achieved by the team leader alone. Paul Akers of FastCap realized this vital point. That is why he instituted the 2 Second Lean in his company. He believes that everyone can make at least a 2-second improvement every day.

Employees in a successful Lean organization such as FastCap recognize and pay tribute to one another in their daily meeting. This recognition is not limited to their team. They recognize people in support areas. For example, a sales rep might recognize the efforts of the pre-press person for catching an error or the production person for extra effort to get a critical job out in time. Brian Tracy, speaker and author and Darren Hardy, speaker, author, and advisor both tell how small incremental changes keep the momentum going and compound into success. Lean success is a journey, not a destination.

Recognition goes a long way in keeping the momentum going. As I mentioned in previous podcasts, Gallop research reported that only 13% of employees are engaged in their job. 63% are not engaged and 24% are actively disengaged. You can't succeed implementing Lean if your employees are not engaged. Another study revealed that when you express gratitude and praise 4 or more times in a quarter, employees are more engaged, and it can increase



employee retention as much as 96%. Recognition makes employees feel appreciated, and it also increases their feeling of self-worth.

Neuropsychology experts tell us to recognize and praise employees for the qualities they can develop. For example, say to the employee that you know they can be a great leader as they are developing good communication, organization, and judgment skills. When you express support for those skills, it creates a message in their unconscious to work on developing those skills to achieve their potential.

Rick Sheridan of Menlo Innovations, Paul Akers of FastCap, and Mike Wilz of Sur Seal all agree that giving tours of their successful Lean companies not only inspire guests, but the tours also motivate and inspire the employees. Check out their sites these companies are flourishing, and the employees love giving the tours and seeing the guests inspired by what they see.

Finally, give employees not only recognition but also clear direction and help them visualize success. They can't work toward a target that they can't see. Envisioning it dramatically increases the ability to achieve the goal. Great speakers, athletes, and actors all envision success. Many of them have visualization coaches to help them achieve their goals. There are quite a few books available on visualization and how it can unlock your potential.

Clear direction is essential. You wouldn't start driving to a meeting or a vacation to a villa without directions or at least an address to enter into your GPS. So why would you begin a Lean or Continuous Improvement program without giving clear directions on the path to your success? Ensure the vision you provide incorporates systems thinking and a shared vision. Use words to create mental models for success. Also, ensure you provide training for the team and coaching to develop personal mastery of the required skills for success. Then celebrate all the successes, large and small.

Stories are extremely helpful in creating a clear vision of success and the journey to get there. You can find some useful podcasts, blog posts, and tools on our website to help you create stories of success.



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Remember change is not a single event. Creating a Lean culture of continuous improvement is an ongoing process. As my friend, Alan Coletta of Siemens Healthcare Diagnostics says, “Lean is an unrelenting focus on continuous improvement.”

Celebrate success, praise your team and watch them become a galaxy of superstars.

Well, that wraps up our podcast for today. Thanks to my producer and audio engineer John Switzer, for his excellent 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. We're at 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.

Well, Bye, bye for now.