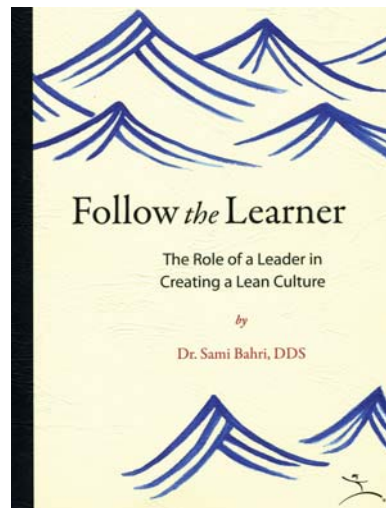


Customer-focused improvement

Follow the Learner: The Role of a Leader in Creating a Lean Culture

How many times have you showed up for an appointment at the dentist's office and scrunched into a chair in the waiting room, only to be "entertained" for what seems forever by the cheerful sounds of elevator music and the occasional departure (escape?) of patients scheduled earlier that day? If you were lucky or perhaps an optimist, these patients inspired hope rather than fear about your dental prospects, as the wait time dragged on and on. There is a better way, and Dr. Sami Bahri, "the lean dentist," has found it. In his book, *Follow the Learner: The Role of a Leader in Creating a Lean Culture*, Dr. Bahri shares insights about how lean concepts familiar to many manufacturers can be successfully applied in non-traditional environments.

After witnessing the negative impact of long leadtimes on patient's health, Dr. Bahri began a quest for learning how to transform a traditional "batch and queue" practice to one-patient flow. Customer-focused lean implementation drew on the support and suggestions of staff, leading to experimentation with new processes (simplify storage of supplies, have dentists perform all treat-



Dr. Sami Bahri, DDS
The Lean Enterprise Institute, Cambridge, MA 2009, 88 pp.

ments in one visit, etc.) and culling process steps that do not add value.

Standardized work, breaking down barriers between functions, and leveling the schedule by comparing takt time to a procedure's cycle time and determining the number of people needed to do the task may not sound like the terminology you'd find in many dentists' practices. While

they are among the essentials of improvements such as dramatically reducing patients' time to complete treatment, they are only one part of the continuous improvement picture in Bahri Dental Group. Dr. Bahri shares suggestions for identifying a new mental model for the organization, and sustaining change through collective attention to improvement. Put the customer first, pursue quality and productivity with equal passion, understand and treat the organization as a system, cross-train to meet the needs of the patient he counsels. More basics: Create a learning environment safe for experimentation and communicate clearly with patients.

Respect for people also marks the successful lean organization, as reflected in Dr. Bahri's practice and writings. He favors building consensus over attempts to control, finding ways to create organization-wide inspiration to create, change, and improve. In this small book the reader will encounter profound learnings about lean transformation in sometimes-unexpected places.

Lea A.P. Tonkin, Target executive editor, lives in Woodstock, IL.

Shared learning

AME LinkedIn Members Discuss Reading Groups

One way to develop a learning organization.

Want more ways to learn from others about the resources they'd found for building and sustaining enterprise excellence? One place to turn is AME LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com), and search "groups" for AME. While two AME groups have emerged on

LinkedIn, their leaders are working to eliminate the duplication of effort.) for networking with fellow practitioners. Following are excerpts from members' recent comments about reading groups and other shared learning activities.

Bob Bracale, manufacturing controller, CPA, Six Sigma Black Belt: "I like the 'small social network' approach to learning, where a group of peers, working with a mentor that they select, come together to examine a topic of mutual common inter-



est. This could form itself around the review of a book. I think this approach leads to situations where the group dynamics don't become an impediment to success but instead facilitate it. I have found these learning situations far more rewarding and effective than the top-down, push format."

Jason Joy, plant manager, Bridgetown Natural Foods: "Our lean transformation team studied together a lot. We started with 'light' reading – *The One Minute Manager* by Blanchard and Johnson. As the group matures, you can get into the heavies like Senge and Drucker. I remember a case where a quality problem cropped up and a book study set the stage for major change. High-level executives had to get on the same page with speed; they read and discussed Crosby's *Quality Without Tears* to do it. I am currently helping three supervisors change a culture, and using *Gung-Ho* from Blanchard."

Didier Rabino, plant manager, Andersen Windows: "My team of six lean managers and engineers started by reading the four books recommended for the AME/SME/ Shingo Prize certification: *Lean Thinking*, *Gemba Kaizen*, *Lean Production Simplified*, and *Learning to See*. My intent is to develop the lean thinking of the team, increase its credibility, standardize our vocabulary, and further develop our already strong team spirit. The book club experience has been very valuable and we are now working on the fourth book. We had plenty of fun during each lunch-and-learn session (I was paying for lunch).

"Here is our process: Four of us volunteered to each lead discussion of one of the books. Each week we read a third of the book and meet for lunch together. The leader prepares a list of

questions to compare our knowledge and thoughts with what was said in the book. The person responsible for leading the book discussion is the 'book leader.' The book leader is the process owner. He or she knows the answers and has studied the book more than the others. The book leader sees that the team covers all the questions during 90 minutes, challenges team members' thoughts, and shares learning experiences. We talk about our current way of running the business and how we could improve. This is a very engaging experience that has brought the team closer. I intend to start the process with my new team.

"In order for other departments of the company to share our learning experience, the questions we created for the books have been made available in our lean website. We now have six books the different departments can use and we are going to start book number seven. Eight to 12 departments have used or are using the book club format along with the questions my lean department created. This is one way to develop a learning organization."

Paul Howlett, senior consultant with WDI Group, Inc.: "I have never tried a reading group, but it is intriguing to get some people off the mark with some background discussion. When working with senior managers in workshops, I have insisted they read some article or book and discuss their opinions. We have used *Lean Thinking* and *The DNA of the Toyota Production System* as starting points."

Karen Wilhelm, Target contributing editor, is publisher of the blog Lean Reflections.

Recommended Resources

Creating a Learning Culture, Marcia Conner and James Clawson, 2004.

Decoding the DNA of the Toyota Production System, Steven Spear and H. Kent Bowen, 1999 (article available from hbr.harvardbusiness.org).

The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization, Peter M. Senge, paperback, 2006.

Gung Ho! Turn On the People in Any Organization, Ken Blanchard, 1997.

Gemba Kaizen: A Commonsense, Low-Cost Approach to Management, Masaaki Imai, 1997.

Lean Production Simplified: A Plain-Language Guide to the World's Most Powerful Production System, second edition, Pascal Dennis, 2007.

Lean Thinking: Banish Waste and Create Wealth in Your Corporation, second edition, James P. Womack and Daniel T. Jones, 2003.

Learning to See: Value Stream Mapping to Create Value and Eliminate Muda, Mike Rother and John Shook, 2003.

Management Challenges for the 21st Century, Peter F. Drucker, paperback, 2007.

The One Minute Manager, Kenneth Blanchard, Spencer Johnson, paperback revised edition, 2000 (find the book through Amazon.com used book affiliates or on used book websites like AbeBooks.com).

Quality Without Tears: The Art of Hassle-Free Management, Philip B. Crosby, hardcover, 1984; softcover, 1995.

Required reading for the AME/SME/Shingo Prize Lean Certification; www.sme.org/leancert; the full recommended reading list is available in the Supporting Resources box.

Submit a book, DVD, or other resource material for inclusion in Resources to Lea Tonkin, crew257@comcast.net.