

## How Do You Develop Lean Leaders in Your Organization?

*Are you using Lean as a point solution to try to solve an immediate need, or is it part of your company's overall strategic plan? Have you discovered how to make Lean sustainable within your organization? Successfully taking the Lean journey takes a commitment from the team and from leadership. So, if there is not a seasoned sensei already in your organization, you are probably trying to develop Lean leaders organically. There are 3 key strengths necessary to develop an effective Lean leader and assessing the potential in possible candidates is the critical first step.*

### 1. **Develop Lean thinkers:**

Ask yourself this: "who in your organization already sees things through a Lean lens"? This person should be able to recognize waste, provide strong ideas for improvement, and are excited about making changes to enhance your company. Additionally they should be able to follow through with ideas – "put the pen to paper", so to speak, and then be open to and understand how to make adjustments through the PDCA (plan–do–check–adjust) cycle.

### 2. **Develop skilled practitioners:**

The most technical part of Lean leadership is developing certain skills that practitioners use. Part of this is the ability to learn specific processes or tools, such as facilitation and instruction on the soft skills side, and how to lead a Kaizen event, SMED (Single-Minute Exchange of Dies) techniques, Value Stream Mapping, and more on the technical side. A person can learn the basics through classes, but the best learning will come by the proven method: watch someone who is good, try to emulate, evolve your own talent and learn from every opportunity.

### 3. **Develop leaders (irrespective of Lean):**

People follow leaders because these leaders:

- Lead people down paths with potential – some paths are rockier than others, but they always have a clear vision
- Make things happen instead of sitting on the sidelines
- Motivate or inspire people around them
- Are trustworthy and they care about their team

Once you've established that Lean champion, it's important to realize that not everyone else with a leadership position has to be a Lean leader. They do however have to understand the common goals, buy into them, and support and reinforce the message to their respective teams (i.e. not stand in the way).

*In the early phase of the Lean journey, the best formula I have ever come across is: find the most likely team members who possess key leadership traits or talents and invest in and develop them to the fullest. Taking the initial momentum and building upon it will lead to more people buying in to the overall goal and building a Lean culture. As the Lean journey within your organization takes shape, additional leaders will begin to emerge. It's just as important to nurture and reward these new Lean leaders as it is to continue fostering the skill set of the original Lean leader, as this will help to sustain the culture in your manufacturing company.*

**For more information on how GaMEP can help develop Lean leaders and a Lean culture:**

Sam Darwin, Project Manager

*Expertise includes: lean transformation, logistics, recovery from import competition, and more*

Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP) at Georgia Tech

sam.darwin@innovate.gatech.edu