THINKING ABOUT RESPECT

with essays by...

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THINKING
ABOUT
RESPECT

Curated by Jim Luckman, Karl Ohaus, and David Verble
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INTRODUCTION
Karl Ohaus

What does the lean idea of respect really mean?

Respect in Practice

INTRODUCTION
By Karl Ohaus

2020 closed out as a year of powerful and provocative events, a year that has raised many questions about how we live together. The concepts of respect, trust, and responsibility have been brought to the front of the social dialogue and are buzzing in this background still.

What I saw in 2020 was a shift in thinking that we all need to listen better, understand more, and be more intentional about the consequences of the choices we make. These are all characteristics that will serve us well if we embrace them in 2021. As a consultant, I find that clients often expect me to be the holder of wisdom, whether it's on the topic of the lean idea for respect for people or anything else. But the reason I joined Lean Transformations Group with David Verble, Jim Luckman, John Shook, Tom Shuker, Guy Parsons, and Kirk Paluska—first as an associate in 2004, later as a partner—was because LTG acknowledged that the client and their team members (the real "value creators") are often the true source of wisdom. As coaches, it's our job to help lean leaders work with team members to realize their potential.

When I think about the role of coaches, I think of what Daihatsu Chairman said about Taiichi Ohno, father of the Toyota Production System:

> "What became clear during my work with Ohno-san is that his chief interest was something other than reducing work-in-process, raising productivity, or lowering costs… His ultimate aim, I gradually learned, was to help employees assert their full potential. And when that happens, all those other things will occur naturally."

This was from a January 1998 talk by Michikazu Ranaka that you can find in an excellent book published by The Lean Enterprise Institute in 2009 called *The Birth of Lean: Conversations with the Founders of TPS* by editors Koichi Shimokawa and Takahiro Fujimoto, translated by Brian Miller. This understanding, that the real role of the leader is to allow each person to realize their full potential is so easy to talk about and so hard to practice in real life. But it's critical because ultimately, it's about trust and respect.

For all of these reasons, my partners and I at Lean Transformations Group are excited to share this reader on the theme of respect and care. We asked colleagues, clients, and friends to write essays on what the lean idea of respect for people means to them and how they have aimed to demonstrate respect for people in their teams and workplaces. As the essays started to roll in, I was moved by their collective thinking. The process of developing this reader reminded me of the benefit of asking powerful questions. The simple act of asking our friends to reflect, think, and share their wisdom (and do something with it) made a difference.

I appreciate all of the essays in this collection, but I'm particularly moved by Jim Womack's essay which kicks off this reader and expands the conversation on respect. As always, Womack challenges leaders to think more deeply about what respect for people means and offers incredibly helpful insights about what it looks like in our organizations today. I also enjoyed my colleague Andrew Lingel's extremely thoughtful essay which explores the idea that as a leader, you need a certain amount of healthy outrage to change your organization's culture, solve problems, and succeed. I know I've found this to be true myself. We can channel our frustration to strengthen our team and improve the work experience for team members.

I encourage you to take the time to read each of these essays. Each author brings their own unique experience and adds another dimension to the lean idea of respect. As you read, I hope you reflect on your own lean moments where the dialogue was rich and the learning rewarding.

Thought without action is waste, so I'll close by asking you to do something different in 2021. Be thoughtful, and please, find new ways to listen well and show respect. When you can do this as a leader, I know you and your team will enjoy the outcome.

Respect for People: Creating the Context

By James P. Womack

I've been thinking about respect for people in work situations for decades. For me, managers being polite and "looking out for their employees" has always been table stakes. The real test of respect is whether managers actually believe that everyone, with a bit of training, can engage in problem solving and kaizen to find better ways to do value creating work with fewer inputs—time, space, inventory, capex, etc.—and with better work experience. In addition, in "respectful" organizations, team members whose problem and improvement skills are honed by lengthy practice have the same beliefs about other team members. And, if everyone *practices* respect (and it must be standard practice every day), it becomes the organizational norm. So simple. So hard to achieve and sustain.

Recently, I have been thinking about the larger, organizational context of respect. I began my thinking with the simple premise that it's hard to respect strangers. If managers face a churning workforce with no expectation that anyone will stay very long, it's hard to justify the training in problem solving and improvement that are required to create teams that are "respectable". And, if employees have no skills for problem solving and kaizen, because they don't stay long enough to practice them, management's disrespectful view is quickly confirmed. At the same time, if employees don't feel any loyalty to the organization, it's hard for them to justify making special efforts to solve problems and to improve the work that they won't be performing for very long. Remember that improving the work is always hard work!

So, respect requires basic stability in the workforce. Indeed, I believe that true respect requires a plan for every employee, just as lean manufacturers have a plan for every part, to make sure that every employee has the skills they need at every phase of their career to solve problems and improve processes at their level. Doing this requires a commitment by employers to go far beyond the traditional practice of promising that no worker will lose their job because of kaizen. It means creating reserve funds to protect the workforce during downturns in the economy and market shocks (e.g., pandemics) and due to strategic mistakes by management in responding to an ever-changing world.

Finally, it requires employers to steadily raise employee compensation in step with the cost savings and pricing power provided by steadily improving every value creating process.

But wait. Creating a culture of respect also requires a commitment by employees to stick with a respectful organization and steadily improve their skills so that they can continually create more value to justify the employer's expenditures in developing their capabilities, defending their jobs, and increasing compensation in step with productivity. This means that respect must be reciprocal; it must run from employee to employer as well as the reverse.

As I have continued to think about respect over the years, I have also realized that there are additional organizational elements: The different parts of an organization must have respect for the other parts and refuse to improve their own performance at the expense of degrading the performance of others. I think about this every time I see a team of production workers trying to "improve" broken, defective, totally un-lean processes handed them by product development teams. (These efforts are, of course, rework, not kaizen.) This is a similar situation to the mass production managers who, over many decades, asked workers to spend their days fixing the defects in products at the end of the line that were created by other production workers struggling with defective processes upstream. No respect there. Similarly, organizations need to respect their suppliers by not asking them to do the impossible to make the producer's life easy or by asking customers to accommodate to the provider's defects and performance shortfalls. No respect there either.

So, respect is a big thing and the spread of respect as an attitude and a practice could make all of our lives better. But how can managers (who need to make the first move) actually create the conditions for mutual respect?

The ideas about respect that I have described were pioneered in Japan, a culture where workers expect to stick with an employer from high school or college to retirement and where suppliers and dealers share a destiny with the producer. And the best practitioner of respect has been Toyota, a firm that responded to its financial crisis in 1950 by creating a large reserve fund that has permitted it to protect every permanent employee through every crisis for the past 70 years and to protect its suppliers as well. Thus, the Toyota workforce has been remarkably stable and has developed the greatest capabilities I have observed for problem solving and improvement. This is the opposite of the situation of most employers today.

As we struggle with a pandemic and recession, creating a respectful culture may sound hopeless. But, as one of my favorite Japanese sensei, Chihiro Nakao, said to managers who argued that his improvement proposals were impossible: "Oh, in that case they must be very hard, so we must start immediately."

My action item: Let's not waste this crisis. Start immediately to think about how your organization—managers and employees at every level—can create the context for sustainable respect in the new normal. The answer will be different in every organization, but the benefits, for firms and society, will be enormous in every case.

Honor Your Value Creators
By Jim Luckman

Since the Gallup Organization started surveying employee engagement in 2000, we've been made acutely aware that only 30 percent of employees are fully engaged in their work. Over the past 20 years there has been an improving trend. In July of 2020, for example, about 40 percent of workers were fully engaged after a large dip in June of 31 percent, when we experienced protests across our nation.

There is high correlation between engagement and organizational performance. Kevin Kruse, author of *Employee Engagement 2.0*, tells us that organizations with high engagement scores have 2x customer loyalty, 3x net sales, and 2x annual net income, among other advantages. For so many reasons, engagement rightly continues to be a concern for business leaders. But how do we increase engagement? There are many theories about motivation. The general consensus is that leaders and managers motivate their employees. But this is *extrinsic* motivation; superiors using their higher organizational position to convince others to work harder. The alternative theories are based on *intrinsic* motivation where the desire comes from within the individual.

Some leaders will tell you that "people are just lazy," which is why they don't believe in intrinsic motivation. But over and over again, I've experienced just the opposite. When individuals become a part of a highly energized team, they become individually energized and are intrinsically motivated to perform at a higher level.

We all have the same needs

Let's try a different way of thinking about engagement. Consider, as Aristotle suggested, that we are all human beings and have the same needs. Those needs span across our organization from the top (leadership) to bottom (value creators). What are our fundamental needs? The leading theory on self-determination and intrinsic motivation was explained through a collaboration between Edward Deci and Richard Ryan from the University of Rochester. They started their study in 1985 which ultimately led to their 2018 book *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*.

Deci and Ryan say there are three needs we all have as humans:

- Autonomy: the ability to interact with the world based on alignment with our needs.
- Competence: the skills we have that enable us to solve problems, and
- Relatedness: the ability to feel a connection with others

If we can respect the fact that we all share these needs, and if we work together toward common goals while moving toward our own individual ends, then everyone wins.

So, what if instead of "rolling out" engagement programs, we develop the same fundamental skills that benefit all, at all levels of the organization? For example, the skill of problem solving is fundamental for everyone. What about working to create problem solvers at all levels of the organization?

Start with the high leverage points: the "value creators"

Let's think about the importance of the value creators, the people doing the *direct, frontline work* at the work process level. Value creators are generally less engaged than leaders and managers. According to a 2013 article from GRF CPA's and Advisors, leaders and managers had a 36 percent engagement rate vs. manufacturing workers at 24 percent. And yet, it is the value creator, with the lower engagement numbers, who is key to making real performance improvements. Together, value creators are the hub of knowledge in the organization. Why? Value creators have the greatest understanding and knowledge of the way the work is *currently* being done, and it is from this place that continuous improvement can take place and be accelerated.

What this reminds us is that the *system* and *culture* need to change so that value creators are respected, honored, and intrinsically motivated, using self-determination theory for personal growth while taking advantage of their knowledge to make real work process and organizational improvements.

As I have written in *Transforming Leader Paradigms*, the role of the leader is to create the conditions for respecting the *thinking* of these value creators so that everyone can benefit, both personally and organizationally. In other words, there is a way to close the knowledge gap and the motivation gap at the same time.

When value creators are focused on problem solving to improve organizational performance, they can use these same newly developed skills to pursue their own personal aspirations. This problem-solving process, along with leaders creating the environment for self-determination, is what produces the right conditions for intrinsic motivation and high levels of engagement.

The three basic skills required to create such conditions are:

1. Effective problem solving,
2. Respectful social interactions, and
3. Fast learning cycles

When value creators are *actively* solving problems using these three skills, they form new habits, people are more respectful toward each other, and both personal growth and organizational performance improve. The result is high performance thanks to genuinely enthusiastic, collaborative individuals and teams.

At Lean Transformations Group, we've spent decades helping leaders and managers help value creators become more "engaged", and not engaged in just anything… The idea is to get people engaged in solving *real organizational problems*. What we know, because we have observed it first-hand, is that organizations that approach change this way—by involving value creators in identifying and solving well-defined business problems—have the greatest chance of making a meaningful difference. This is the way sustainable continuous improvement becomes possible.

Leaders in these kinds of organizations recognize that using an effective problem-solving process is critical. If such a process doesn't exist, effective leaders do the hard work of creating one! No less important, these leaders realize that trust is created by leading with respect and humility. They facilitate and continually encourage fast cycles of learning because they know that deep reflection, including their own, is key to sustainability. Perhaps more than anything else, these leaders understand that their role is dramatically different from most of the stories we've been told about leadership… They are committed to guiding a culture transformation that grows from the bottom up, not top down.

Levers for Change: Outrage, Knowledge & Empathy, Shared Destiny
By Andrew Lingel

When it comes to "respect for people" in a lean context, there is nothing really more disrespectful in my mind than asking people to solve problems they can't solve, paying them more for doing the same, and allowing the status quo in the process to stay the same with unfulfilled promises it will get better. This is why I believe "respect for people" is the most misunderstood tenet of lean thinking.

In the early days of transformation at my own company, United Plastics Manufacturing (UPF), I saw the results of not understanding the lean concept of respect first-hand. Usually initiated by hollow flag waving, the principle of "respect for people" tends to come out as boisterous cheers like "Rah Rah" and "You can do it!" followed by increased pay and a blind recommendation and/or implementation of what the frontline work should look like (with little to no thought to purpose). Then, when leaders are challenged with implementing a process that will actually help, you get the kickback messages: "The people are not ready," and "Let's just focus on the basics." At the end of a whirlwind of misplaced respect, the warm glow of the feel-good mood wears off and the stark reality sets in: workers are still frustrated and no more value for the customer has been created.

As a President who has led teams for seven years, my perspective is that a leader must understand and demonstrate three key things to show respect for workers and create respectful work processes:

- **Outrage**. A leader must be dissatisfied with the current state enough to actually do something about it.

- **Knowledge & Empathy**. This is more than cursory info of the job or knowing the employee's name; it is a deep understanding of the work someone is being asked to perform and who you are asking to perform it.

- **Shared Destiny**. A leader must work with others to create a shared destiny. The value creators and the leaders of the organization must believe they are partners in their own personal success as well as the organization's success.

Outrage

There was a key moment in our own lean journey at UPF that, for a while, had me stumped. In retrospect, I see that it challenged my own early understanding of respect for people. Our shop floor performance was poor. We wanted to do time studies to understand the current situation better, so we set up a video camera at a workstation and informed the employees of the purpose.

I was disheartened by what I saw watching the video. As the organization was struggling financially and struggling to navigate our lean journey, this employee in-between welds had time to do a little jig as well as twirl his hammer for what felt like minutes, when really it was only

seconds. Witnessing him twirl his hammer was not luck; this was his favorite pastime. He'd even added silver metallic tape to the bottom of the hammer to add some more pizzazz to the twirl.

I remember talking with our coach Karl Ohaus about the situation... I was at a crossroads. We were not making money and were getting pressure to abandon this Lean thing. How could we make improvements and get product out the door with people literally twirling the hammer? Did I need to hire better people? Pay people more money? His answer was game changing.

Karl: "Who gave him permission to do it?"

Me: "No one."

Karl: "Someone has given him permission because he is doing it... Furthermore, he knows he is being taped, so this is not an abnormal behavior. Management is allowing this to exist."

Our *process* allowed for hammer twirling to happen. Upon rewatching the video, I realized that the group lead or supervisor never appears. It was not the employee's fault for hammer twirling; it was my fault for permitting this behavior to exist. In Pascal Dennis's business fable *Andy & Me*, the coach shares the good advice, "Be hard on process, easy on the people." But in my estimation, Dennis misses another important idea: "Be hard on managers/leaders who are charged with creating processes, especially processes for problem solving." I had genuine outrage at the fact that I allowed this problem to exist.

Eventually, this drove me to take on the role of plant manager, get closer to problems, run experiments, and try and solve gaps in the production process that the Director of Manufacturing and Plant Manager were unable or unwilling to do. "Respect for people" in this case meant that we never penalized this employee for hammer twirling because ultimately, it was management's fault that we allowed it to happen. This person was just one team member from our lowest performing plant, and it's important to note that he was also still there six months later when the plant started breaking production records and contributed ideas to solving real problems. It all started with having outrage that we had allowed hammer twirling to happen in the first place and everything that didn't work in our process that needed to change.

Knowledge & Empathy

After a tour of a large box manufacturer who had been struggling on their lean journey, I once asked a colleague, "Where would you start with their transformation?" My answer to the question was simple and clear. I said, "I would buy the man a mallet."

On our tour I had witnessed an operator who was tasked with changing over ink drums, slamming the palm of his hand to seal the covers back on. So, to me, my natural starting point would be to buy him a mallet so he wouldn't have to struggle to do his job. I wouldn't do a time study on performance pre-mallet and post-mallet, I wouldn't calculate the ROI on getting the

mallet, I would just go over ask if a mallet would help and then get it as soon as I could because speed to action counts!

"Respect for people" means having knowledge of the job someone is doing, deeper knowledge of the tasks that person is doing, and then witnessing how tasks are performed, plus gaining the knowledge of what may improve the work. It means having the outrage to fix obviously bad situations and feeling empathy for the person that you have effectively put in a bad situation. The goal of the leader must be to solve problems (the gaps in process and the methods used in the tasks of the work). It must also be about engaging value creators about these gaps and potential solutions. If the worker has an idea that won't work and explains why, and then together you reach a solution… In the words of famed World War II general George Patton, "A good plan, violently executed now, is better than a perfect plan next week."

Respect for value creators then is also about having empathy and understanding when issues inevitably occur. The leader's job is to create a safe environment where mistakes happen and learning and problem solving can happen. Problems/issues are not bad; failing to learn from them is. For example, we recently had an issue when a defect was made on the production floor. Our plant manager blamed the operator for making the mistake. If he had taken the time to look more deeply at the issue, however, he would have seen that the work instruction for the job was not clear, and if he didn't fix *that* problem, the mistake would happen again.

Shared Destiny

The last piece to showing respect is about creating a shared destiny between the organization and frontline workers. This can be done many ways, but is typically illustrated in bonus programs like a profit share. This way the team's success in improving the work is tied to organizational success. This shared destiny is the foundation for idea generation and continuous improvement, which of course needs to be reinforced by leadership and tied to focused problem solving.

Outside of financial performance, creating flow production processes helps create a sense of shared destiny *among* team members. When responsibilities for performance are broken down into smaller shared segments of work, the success or failure moves from "my success" or "my work/job" to "*our* success" and "*our* work/job." The work becomes more about the team's success than individual success. Just like in rowing, how rowing faster than the person in front of you does not help the success of the team, this approach changes team members' outlook. Improvement becomes about helping everyone advance, whether that person is in front of you or behind you. People are inherently social creatures who want to be part of a community. Creating a sense of shared destiny helps prevent the feeling that there is favoritism or that if you do well, you will just be given more work.

As a leader, if you can create a work environment that makes people feel like they are part of a team and they share in the success of the team, what is more respectful than that? That said, there is also the difficult side to the coin that most lean literature just does not talk about. First and

foremost, business enterprises must stay viable, which does not always align with "a job for life" slogans that supposedly demonstrate respect for people. But what a leader must always do is look at the larger picture. If the enterprise goes out of business, that certainly does not show respect to those people who will lose their job, customers who lose a supplier of goods, and so on. So making moves to ensure that the business enterprise is successful has to be a top priority. In some instances, you can offer a job for life, but it doesn't mean you must offer people the *same* job or the same pay for life. As a leader and decision maker, "showing respect" may mean trying to align people with their best fitting role within the enterprise and then giving folks the option to stay on in that role or leave the enterprise if they so choose.

Similarly, some work can't be automated just as some work should never be performed by human beings. Automation and semi-automation decisions fit into these arenas as well. In an article in *The International Journal of Production Research*, Y. Sugimorie writes:

> "The second waste is having the workers perform operations that are by nature not suitable for men. Operations involving danger, operations injurious to health, operations requiring hard physical labour, and monotonous repetitive operation have been mechanized, automated, and unmanned."

In supporting team members and creating a sense of shared destiny, leaders must look at why and when to automate. If it's not about business viability, you should always try to automate out work functions that are really not fit for people to be doing. If you keep that in mind in your process design, you are showing respect for people by eliminating jobs where human beings add no value. Ultimately, you can try and relocate or train the workers who had been doing these types of jobs, but if you can't, you must let these people go and hope that they can find jobs where they can add value. Staying employed while doing mindless hard labor is not respectful.

In my experience, a lot of people will look at this list and try to eliminate one or two things. Folks want to do one thing and say, "I have respect for people because I do *this*!" But I truly believe as leaders, we need to do these three things simultaneously to lead a successful team and to truly show respect. Is it enough to offer profit bonuses, but ignore team members' repeated requests to improve the working conditions? Is it respectful to keep everyone employed, but not shift in a changing economic climate and then the enterprise goes out of business? No.

Why do so many leaders go down the path of "respect equals blind listening, more money, and 5S"? Because it is easier. But showing real respect is hard, messy, and complicated. It is not black and white; it is filled with gray areas and tons of effort. Most leaders don't have it in them to pursue what is actually needed to be done to make real change. Still, trying every day to do better is the goal.

Respect Others by Listening to Their Work Experience
By Mike Orzen

Respect is less about how we feel about our people and more about what we do for our people.

So many work processes are performed "unconsciously" in the sense that they are done without a clear understanding of the key steps, the degree of expected quality, how much time the work should take, and how difficult the work should be. Beyond treating people well, respecting people is about being thoughtful and intentional about the work experience of the people you lead. When organizations leave work totally undefined, they leave it to each person to try to figure out the best way to do the work based on their own singular, personal opinion. This usually creates a chaotic mess.

Recently, I was working with a large tech company whose new customer onboarding process was a combination of tribal knowledge and make-it-up-as we-go work processes. After doing a thorough virtual "go and see," it was clear to me that everyone was suffering, including the people doing the work and new customers who were shocked by the delays, uncoordinated communications, and the overall disappointing experience. I asked the leader who I was working with, "What kind of a message do you think this sends to your people and your customers?" He said, "We don't really care about you!" I think he nailed it… When work processes are left undefined and open to personal opinion, we send a strong message to people: "We accept the status quo, so do your best with our broken processes."

When I am coaching leaders and team members, I often ask, "How long has this process been broken?" Invariably I hear, "As long as I can remember," or "It's always been that way, so we've learned to make it work." But trying to make a broken process work means wasteful extra steps, mistakes, rework, interruptions, and highly variable flow of the work. It also means there is little stability around the time it takes to deliver work and the quality of the work that the customer receives. No one is happy, and frontline workers live in fire-fighting mode while customers encounter a broad range of unpleasant purchasing and customer support experiences.

But let's get back to the tech company with the broken customer onboarding process. We gathered a team to work on a rapid improvement effort around the new customer onboarding process, employing lean methods and tools. The team came together and worked so well that they completed 11 PDCA learning cycles across four A3s in a period of seven months. The results were amazing in terms of customer feedback and satisfaction, work performance metrics, and teamwork. The team celebrated briefly only to discover that improvement work was not a one-time effort. It became painfully obvious that the process for this and every other type of work needed to be adjusted and improved on an ongoing basis in perpetuity.

When I asked the leader and team members for key insights and takeaways from this experience, the common recognition was that:

- Work processes need to be defined, shared, and honored by everyone doing the work
- It was not enough to improve the work once; ongoing improvement was essential
- Teams needed to be deeply involved in the improvement effort, but also needed support from their leaders and someone who knew lean thinking and practice
- None of the other points really matter if the people who are doing the actual work do not feel respected by their leaders
- The best way to show respect is to enable team members to improve their own work processes as a central element of their daily work

So what concrete actions can leaders take?

1. "Go and see." Spend time with your people doing the daily work on the frontlines to understand what it is to stand in their shoes and do the work.

2. Identify the core work processes that the team performs (just ask folks!)

3. After watching, asking, and observing, ask yourself, "Is this work process *stable, commonly applied, predictable,* and *effective*?"

4. If not, ask the team to answer the question, "What is the problem we need to solve?"

5. Create an opportunity for the team to hold an improvement event (aka Kaizen event) with adequate support and coaching for them to be successful.

In short, honor the work of others by honoring their work experience. As a leader, when you take the time to deeply understand the challenges your team members face and the impact these have on teams and customers, you demonstrate more respect for people while driving improved performance. This is a win-win for the customer, the team, and the entire organization. Ultimately, it is not what you personally think or feel about the *idea* of respect that counts; it's about what you actually do to support your people.

Demonstrate your respect for others by addressing broken processes in your organization. This is one of the most effective ways to say, "We care about you."

Lean Thinking Won't Make Your Organization More Equitable

By Lex Schroeder

There's a conversation happening about whether or not lean thinking and practice helps make work more fair and equitable. This matters to me because as a queer woman who has worked to create space for more diversity (and just diversity of thought) in the lean community and who has aimed to adapt Lean for non-manufacturing and new contexts, it feels important to discuss what Lean is and what it isn't… what it can do and what it can't.

Lean thinking and practice is a way of thinking about and designing work that puts the emphasis on creating value, minimizing waste, and solving problems (with methodical processes for solving problems). It's not a panacea; it's not a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging strategy; and it's not a way of showing up in more human ways in the moment with another person who is experiencing oppression. If anything, while Lean encourages people to show much more care for each other in terms of respecting everybody's *work*, it is primarily a way of putting aside emotion to create healthy distance from the work at hand and simply look at the "flow of value" from the organization to the customer (aka community member).

It can be hugely helpful in this way, as I've learned from teachers and colleagues, so that you can just look at what is currently happening and the work to be done. Why? It is difficult to look at the problems in the design and delivery of work without resorting to blame. Most people care a great deal about their work, and nine times out of 10, it's not one individual's fault that an error (big or small) happens. Problems are usually a result of poorly designed processes based on too little or the wrong information or little to no intentional process design. This is why people need better ways of designing and improving work, problem solving, thinking systemically, communicating, hearing each other, and thinking together. Lean helps you focus on these things in partnership with your fellow team members. It can help you focus on collecting just the facts and see "problems as treasures" (as Toyota says) because the minute you can see a problem, you have a chance to fix it. This approach to problem solving certainly has the *potential* to contribute to teams' well-being and health, but by itself, does not advance gender or racial equity.

In her piece, "Why Don't We Just Call Agile What It Is: Feminist," Hannah Thomas Uose explores some of these ideas, making connections between Lean and Agile to feminism and other movements for justice. About the Agile manifesto, she writes:

"The men who wrote the manifesto are unclear on whether they invited any women. Even so, the thing I notice from both the manifesto, the accompanying principles, and the fact that these 17 men call themselves 'organizational anarchists' is that what they came up with is inherently subversive, anti-authoritarian, and feminist. There is an emphasis on self-organising, collaboration, experimentation, welcoming change, and building high-trust and supportive relationships."

Here's to high self-organization, collaboration, experimentation, etc. The problem is, you can have all of these things and the organization can still treat people unfairly in other ways.

- A team can talk about the lean idea of "respect for people" and respect the frontline worker in terms of respecting their work and contribution of "value", but not their leadership or personhood. And that organization can be all white or 95 percent white, with a 95 percent white male leadership team and board.
- You can have some diversity on your team and practice lean principles in ways that boost collaborative problem solving, but shy away from or ignore the really hard work of listening to women when they speak, following the leadership of Black and brown leaders (not just including them into existing structures and teams), putting an end to discriminatory behavior, and designing for accessibility.
- Leaders can still decide to not pay people a living wage or listen to people when they say they are hurting (or see another person/community hurting).

As an editor, what I appreciate most about lean thinking is all of the ways it helps information and knowledge flow. As the late systems thinker Donella Meadows wrote (without using the word "lean"):

> *"A decision maker can't respond to information he or she doesn't have, can't respond accurately to information that is inaccurate, can't respond in a timely way to information that is late. I would guess that 99 percent of what goes wrong in systems goes wrong because of faulty or missing information… You can drive a system crazy by muddying its information streams. You can make a system work better with surprising ease if you can give it more timely, more accurate, more complete information."*

This is where I believe Lean can potentially help elevate meaningful work around equity: giving people a way to look at what is happening or what's been happening systemically forever. This truth telling may help create change and boost accountability. As my colleague Jim Luckman says, "Lean thinking has the ability to shift mindsets to fit a new set of values, policies, and practices." Lean can also make new (or old, repeatedly ignored or discounted) knowledge and new *thinking* more visible.

I've aimed to use lean thinking this way for 10+ years now, exploring and applying these ideas more recently with CV Harquail, Gwendolyn VanSant, and Adrian Gill. I've used A3 thinking and coaching to help teams do knowledge management, develop new programs, solve problems, and work more effectively. The goal in these instances is to help teams see/remember what they know, think together, and use a process for problem solving (Plan, Do, Check, Act), which helps folks focus on facts and run experiments, which can (sometimes) make it easier for individuals and teams to do courageous work around advancing equity. "Albeit not a direct diversity, equity,

and inclusion strategy, A3 thinking not only aids in problem solving and program development (with efficiency built in), it establishes goals and benchmarks progress," VanSant says. "In strategies that create more safety and belonging, applying lean thinking becomes an invaluable tool for results-based accountability like no other tool or process I've encountered." But nothing about lean thinking *itself* is inherently just or equitable. Working to make an organization more equitable is its own highly valuable work, and it is almost always under-resourced, questioned for its value, and/or invisible. Unsurprisingly, it typically falls on women and people of color.

In the way that it helps us understand systems, think systemically, and move work along more effectively, lean thinking can help organizations become more equitable *by design* and *in practice*, but like anything, it only gets teams so far. Similarly, lean strategy is only made stronger by designing for equity with or without lean tools. As my colleague Adrian Gill says, "At the end of the day we all want to have a positive experience creating successful outcomes at work. Lean is part of this, but it can't create alignment around new initiatives (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging-related or not) without teams first getting aligned on their values… We need to use our minds to create effective systems and processes, but we also need heart."

Show Respect for Your Team Members, Don't Waste Their Time
By David Verble

What is the most valuable thing most of us have? What is totally irreplaceable and we wish we had more of it, almost daily? Of course it's our time. At work, seldom is there enough time to get done what we need to do as value creators. What is a wonderful way to show respect for our fellow "value creators"? Don't waste *their* time. But our leaders do it to us regularly, and we do it to each other most of the time when we call meetings.

In Toyota in Japan, one of the ways leaders show respect for those who create value for the business is through following the principle of what they call "line out." This is the practice of organizing production lines and workflow so what operators need to do their job *flows* to them with a minimum of additional effort. The intent is to assure that there are as few interruptions to performing value-added work as possible. Given that in North America, when it comes to operations, the focus for respect and convenience has traditionally flowed in the *opposite* direction, it is not likely we will reach that ideal in our lean efforts in the near future. Most of us aren't bad leaders and meeting initiators; we're just not thoughtful. In the process, we end up being disrespectful of the people we ask to attend meetings without realizing it.

You've been to hundreds of business meetings in your career. They used to be face-to-face in conference rooms; now they're mostly face-to-screen on a virtual online platform. Whatever the venue or medium, you've most likely experienced one, more, or all of the following:

- You're waiting for the meeting to start as the clock ticks past the start time. People arrive late. If the leader is a manager, this person likely also rushes in late from another meeting.
- You're often not clear on why you are there other than perhaps the fact that you were asked/told to be.
- You don't know what the meeting is about or what it is supposed to accomplish. (And even when you do know the purpose of the meeting, you often don't know how the meeting is going to go or how you are expected to contribute.)
- You sit there listening to back and forth "smart-talk" as some people push their perspectives or refute others without the discussion settling anything.
- As the end time approaches, your mind is elsewhere. You squirm, worrying about getting to your next meeting, an important phone call, or a deadline.

It's no surprise that the meeting often runs over as the leader rushes to get everything done and says there will be another meeting to wrap things up. I admit, I hoped that when we began having to meet through online platforms that the more constrained medium—plus participants' ability to disengage or disconnect without it being as obvious—might have forced meeting organizers to be more conscious of what they ask of participants and more deliberate in planning meetings. But unfortunately, I see little evidence of that. The responsibility for these short oversights, and the disrespect they imply, is on us as meeting conveners.

These are a few of the thoughtless behaviors I've observed—and did and sometimes *still* do myself—in setting up virtual business meetings that I consider carryovers from old bad habits:

- Send an email invitation that provides a meeting link, but does not describe the nature or purpose of the meeting.
- Launch into meetings without sharing an agenda as though we expect everyone to know the topic and what the outcome relative to the topic is supposed to be. Along these lines, we give participants little or no explanation of why they are asked to attend and no description of what they are expected to contribute other than their presence.
- Call meetings for the purpose of sharing information that could well be provided in more efficient and effective ways. Apparently, it's quicker and easier to get a group of people together and talk *at* them than it is to figure out what to communicate and condense it and write it as a message.
- Include people in meetings just so they will hear what is said or discussed in case they need to know when we don't need them to present to contribute.
- Fail to propose a process for reaching whatever outcome we have in mind and just let the discussions roll, assuming it will produce something worthwhile. (We also seldom ask participants if they agree to the outcome or process for the meeting or if they have suggestions for improving the process).
- Fail to manage discussions, which allows people to disintegrate into prolonged exchanges of opinions dominated by a vocal few while other participants just sit.
- And finally, though this is far from the end of the list, as meeting leaders, we often do not attempt to draw the ideas of the less outspoken members into the discussions or protect them when they *do* speak up.

Engagement, respect, safety, and trust in such online meetings are generally low or non-existent, making participants hesitant to speak up. And these kinds of meetings are highly disrespectful because they usually waste the time, knowledge, and *thinking* of participants and do not enable them to contribute in meaningful ways. This means most online meetings are not improvements on most face-to-face meetings. But virtual meetings and all business meetings could be better social/human experiences for participants—and worthwhile work efforts for their businesses—if the initiators and/or leaders thought through and then shared essential meeting information.

I want to offer a proposal that may be a small, but significant step toward reminding us how to better use the time and effort of the meeting participants. They could be more respectful and productive if we were to draw on the wisdom of Jim Womack's *Purpose, Process, People* framework: By providing this basic information in our meeting invitations and reviewing it at the start of a meeting, we may be able to make meetings a great deal more successful for us as leaders and satisfying for participants.

- **Purpose**: *What's the meeting about? Name the topic, the outcome (assessment of the situation, agreement, solution, strategy, recommendation, decision, plan), and its importance to the business.*
- **Process**: *What will be our method for reaching the outcome (analysis, discussion, negotiation, problem solving, review, reflection, planning), and what's the agenda we propose?*
- **People**: *Who will participate in the meeting and what role(s) will they play in the process? How will they contribute to the outcome (direct participant, stakeholder, decision maker, subject matter expert, reporter, reviewer, group leader, team member, recorder, observer)?*

People have a basic need to know what's going on, know what is expected of them, and know that they are respected for the value they can add. By simply thinking through and providing this information, we show respect for those we invite to any meeting. As leaders and conveners, sharing *Purpose, Process, and People* is a small, respectful step in the right direction.

Improving most things in a business or service operation requires time, effort, and money. The cost of respecting other people by not wasting their time and ability to contribute in meetings is, however, very low, as developing the habit and the return can have benefits beyond estimate. We have little data on its impact on work environments, relationships and engagement, and organizational and operational performance because there are very few businesses where the behavior is the practice... But how different might our work lives be if we did?

Trust is the Most Basic Form of Stability

By Itai Englander

Now that we are in 2021 and are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel thanks to COVID19 vaccines, it feels like the first moment we might reflect on what actually helped us as a company during this harsh era. At Strauss, we met as a leadership team to discuss how the pandemic affected us in 2020 and how we responded. Between April and December 2020, this was our experience:

- We had about 50 people infected with the disease. According to epidemiological studies we conducted, none were infected at our premises.
- More than 50 percent reduction in personnel turnover.
- Zero (yes, zero) temporary workers. This was one of our long-term objectives anyway. The need to work in capsules required us to reduce temporary workers to zero (and to prove to ourselves that it's possible).
- 1 percent increase in OEE, which is good, but we were aiming for a 2 percent increase, so we missed this particular target.

What helped us through as a team? One of my colleagues recently reminded me that I once said, "Trust is the most basic form of stability." This sent me to deep thinking, and in retrospect, I do think it was trust that helped our team the most. The matter of building and maintaining trust involved four components: clarity, stability, support, and hope. Working on these four things helped us tremendously.

Clarity

Like so many organizations, it took time for us to grasp the COVID19 situation clearly and understand the new rules of conduct. It was obvious from the beginning that we had to establish and enforce new rules of social distancing and wear masks, but as time continued on, we came to understand that we needed to do more. We divided our whole workforce into capsules according to shifts and lines, established new rules for eating together, and created different entry and exit channels to our work site. We created bigger resting areas and more of them.

Enforcing the new rules was work of its own as well. We started by sending regular reminders about the rules to our team. We asked heads of various functions to create short videos to send out to the team before big events and holidays, reminding everyone to follow the rules even at home. We even laid off people who could not comply with the rules. The rules applied to everybody, and unnecessary employees were not allowed to enter manufacturing sites. We asked managers to lead by example, modeling the new behaviors.

As one of our team members told us: "The plant is the safe place for me. I know the rules, and I know they are meant to protect me. It's the *most* safe place to be."

Stability

In order to support our larger efforts to stay safe, we made real investments, starting with all of our physical structures. We installed a "safe" workplace with clear separations between workstations. We separated the inbound and outbound walking routes and created more seating areas in the dining room. We froze all large investments in order to ensure the cash flow of the organization, thus freeing our engineers to work around all the adjustments needed. We also reevaluated the roles of all value creators who were not working on site and developed an innovation plan. The new plan was based on the former one, but adjusted to the situation: which KPIs were needed, which could be adjusted to a deep economic depression? The goal was clear: maintain as stable as possible demand from the market even though our world had significantly changed.

Support

Understanding that in these dire times everybody could use some support, we gave a special bonus to all value creators. At a later time, we also evaluated each and every one of our team members. This helped us identify individuals who were most in need of support. About one in eight people received additional help based on need and socioeconomic status. We also built a special website for value creators with answers to different problems starting with phone numbers to call in case of health issues, mindfulness resources and lessons to help people deal with the situation, and much more.

Hope

Even though we froze some of our bigger projects involving larger investments, we continued to build and invest in our company after a while. We did this to send a clear message to people that we still intended to grow our business. Although we don't know when COVID19 will pass, we know it surely will. Sometimes the best message you can deliver is made through actions, not words. So in October 2020, we decided to train selected personnel in a new, more demanding industry 4.0 course. We carefully selected the participants and about one out of three people were accepted into the course. To instill a sense of hope, we made a point to set expectations regarding the future whenever possible. We aimed to establish as much clarity as we could regarding the future, even if the future looked grim. Why? For us, the hardest thing was just the uncertainty about the future, not COVID19 itself. As in every period, but maybe at this one in particular, moving forward with clarity is the most basic, important way we show respect for people.

Valuing the Value Creator: Following My Curiosity in Indonesia
By Elizabeth Luckman

During my time as an MBA student, I opted for a unique summer internship: I worked as a lean coach at a garment factory in Bali. While I had worked in the fashion industry for nearly a decade and had both academic and practical experience with Lean, I had never worked in garment manufacturing, nor spent significant time in Southeast Asia.

My primary motivation for taking this internship was curiosity. I knew there would be a lot for me to learn through my experience, and I thought I could offer some of what I had learned about Lean, problem-solving, and motivation while I was there. I went to this factory with some of what I had learned that I thought would be helpful to the workers, but I was aware that I did not know a single thing about their work processes. I also knew very little about their culture. For these reasons, I approached this engagement as a learner. It was this curiosity that allowed me to understand what it means to "value the value creators," as lean teachers say.

I began by just learning how to communicate with my team. The owner of the factory and some line managers spoke English, however none of the other employees did. I learned limited Bahasa, but not enough to understand informal conversations. So I just observed… watching the work processes and listening to line workers on the job. Since I didn't speak Bahasa, I couldn't listen for meaning, but I could observe non-verbal cues like emotion, tone, and body language.

I was tasked with working with one particular line, so we began having daily meetings. Together we decided to institute a structured reflection process that challenged us to review our daily experiments and what we learned from them. This was led by the line managers, with some guidance from me. In the first few weeks, the line workers who joined us were so shy. They didn't want to share their experiences, their observations, or their opinions with the line manager nor with me. Patiently, but consistently, we continued to meet and people opened up. Translating through the managers who spoke both languages, I asked a lot of questions. I was striving for what Edgar Schein calls "humble inquiry" rooted in my own curiosity. Because I was learning about the process, and was doing so through a language I didn't understand (no matter how hard I tried!), I had *a lot* of things to learn about how they were working. I also wanted to give people space to share.

My primary focus was to provide structure in these meetings to ensure that they were reflecting on what was working, what was not, and identifying experiments that they could try the next day to improve quality and efficiency. But over time, the line workers had much more to say in our meetings. I remember the first time we ran over our meeting time because people had so many opinions about the experiments they were running on the line. They didn't want to leave.

I grew so fond of these people: their efforts, their willingness to engage with me, and their unique contributions to the work. I continued to try to learn the language, which always elicited giggles from the others no matter how hard I tried. One thing I did learn, "terimah kasih banyak," (which means "thank you very much"), I ended up saying to the team ceremoniously every day as I left the factory.

At the end of my summer there, the managers took me out for a very special goodbye dinner. We were sitting on a dock in the water under a tent at a long table with food served family style. We were laughing, swapping stories about our summer together. Toward the end of the night, one manager shared, "When we first heard that there was going to be an intern here coaching us this summer from this fancy MBA program who knew so much about Lean, we were really nervous. We were afraid you would be disappointed in how little we knew, and that you would try to teach us more than we were prepared for. But instead, you didn't know anything about *our* work!" We all laughed, but this was such an important moment of discovery for me. In the end, I realized that while I was indeed able to offer some observations, help people structure their learning, and teach a few things about motivation and engagement, these people…. *they* did the work to improve their work processes. This is what it means to truly value the "value creators".

As leaders, the problem that we face so often is we know so much about what we're doing—and we are so attached to outcomes—that we fail to trust the people who are closest to doing the actual value-creating work. As my father Jim Luckman has written and has taught me, this experience put me squarely in the position where I could not act as a knower; I was forced to be a learner. I built meaningful relationships and supported the people in this factory as they learned, but they learned on their own.

Valuing the value creators requires trusting, *really* trusting the people who are doing the work. What stops us from doing this more often?

Learning How to Listen Well to Reduce the Burden on Workers

By Jesus (Jesse) D. Hernandez Jr.

My understanding of respect for people has evolved several times over in my career, and I suspect it will evolve even more as I continue to learn.

At first I thought respect for people in a lean context simply meant being polite and giving people space to share ideas. In my early days as a leader in the construction industry, I would go over to a work area, brief the team on the eight wastes according to Toyota and proceed to ask, "Ok! So what do you want to improve?" Then, after maybe an hour of "observation," I would hand the crew leader a list of things I thought he should improve and walk away thinking that I just added value. Of course I didn't understand that the team members themselves were the real value creators (and should be treated as such).

Today, my understanding of respect for people consists primarily of two elements: listening and arming team members with a solid knowledge base for improving their work, still working in partnership with people to make improvements. To me, this is where real continuous improvement begins.

On Listening

To be clear, listening in "Jesse land" is demonstrated by the receiver acting upon the messages received in such a way that *it helps ease the pain of the messenger*. Listening requires using my eyes and ears as I seek to improve a work process. I listen with my eyes by tuning into a person's hidden signals such as a clenched jaw, squinted eyes, and/or a short pause paired with a deep breath. These are all visual indicators of "burden" within the work. Seeking to understand someone's thoughts and feelings about their work is a good use of my ears.

On Creating a Knowledge Base for Improvement

Listening carefully gets me close to displaying respect for people, but not 100% there. I try to remember that I must also follow up by equipping the worker with the knowledge and tools they need for continuous improvement. Doing this effectively requires finding a way to integrate the worker's expertise into the proposed improvements as well as the continuous improvement professional investing some sweat equity in deploying said improvement. Both are critical to providing an experience where the improvement is happening *for* the worker.

Approaching continuous improvement this way plants a seed of learning. This seed must be regularly cultivated by inviting the worker into the universe of improvement thinking if they aren't there already. Embarking on this odyssey together is essential because this is what develops the problem-solving skills of the person being coached as well as the coach. To me, this learning partnership is what closes the loop when it comes to demonstrating respect for people.

This particular lesson was burned into my consciousness through a memorable improvement event a little over a year ago. Our team's goal at the time was to remove burdensome work and we were studying the work process of an amazing craftsman by the name of Enrique. His job was landing terminations in electrical gear . I (the receiver) naively asked Enrique (the messenger), "What part of your work is hard?" His response was interesting: "Hard? What are you talking about? It's just work." We smiled at each other, got clear on what the day would look like, and began the formal observation.

As my team and I stood there watching and documenting the steps in Enrique's work, it became clear that this work required a mental and physical toughness that clearly takes years to build. What wasn't yet clear was just the wear and tear it took as well, which Enriqe's body had just absorbed. In reviewing our notes and watching the work process over video, our coach reminded us to seek out the silent indicators of hard work. We generated several improvement ideas and presented them to Enrique. He responded, "That sounds great, but I can't make those things happen and hit the targets I'm supposed to hit." In this same conversation, however, he expressed new interest about an idea regarding a potential new tool balancer that would re-distribute the weight of a particular tool he used in his work process.

The deepest part of my learning happened during this exchange. Not only did Enrique's expertise and input guide the team's improvement efforts, but through careful listening with our eyes *and* ears, we uncovered the hard work that Enrique had become desensitized to over time. We learned that in order to have any effect on Enrique's real work experience, let alone a positive one, we needed to get our own hands dirty in the deployment of the improvements. We got to work.

Within 48 hours, we got the improvements ready for Enrique to test, and thankfully, he was happy to join in the experiment. Then the magic happened. As Enrique used the new heavy tool, he looked up with a smile and gave us a thumbs up. When we debriefed with Enrique the following day, he shared something I'll never forget. "Last night I had the best sleep I've had in years. This could have added another 10 years to my career of working in the field."

At the time we ran the experiment, Enrique was on the verge of retirement. Still, he shared his improvement ideas and experience with other team members in his remaining days at our company. What did I learn from this experience? Focused, intentional observation of work enables us as leaders to experience just a small measure of the workers' pain. This, along with practicing improvement methods *in partnership and in tandem with the worker*, is what it means to show respect for people. Be advised, however, listening well and creating a solid knowledge base for improvement will unlock a flood of potential. With such potential, you and your team members will inevitably have new problems to solve.

Team Members Become Engaged When They Trust You Care

By Adrian Verduzco & Deanna Jenia

Most people need to feel a sense of belonging and connection with others at work (think Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs). In a lean workplace, leaders have a responsibility to create this kind of environment. Leaders model respectful behaviors to demonstrate that genuine personal connection is critical and take time to foster relationship building.

At Raytheon, we encourage leaders to spend time to get to know each of our team members on a personal level. This knowledge allows leaders to truly understand how an individual's mindset, perspective, or personal situation is linked to their productivity, attitude, or engagement at work. However, this concept is not always easily grasped. While discussing this in a recent meeting with frontline leaders, one of our managers said he received the following comment, "Why do we need to build a relationship to be successful? My role is to communicate what is needed and their role is to get it done. It's that simple."

Transforming this thinking starts with creating new insights by sharing more relatable experiences. We often use the following analogy with our leaders: *Have you ever purchased Girl Scout cookies from a family member or close friend when you didn't even want them? Why did you do that? Was it the personal connection? Did you feel the same way about purchasing Girl Scout cookies from the girl outside the grocery store? Indeed, what would our team members do differently if they felt personally connected to us as leaders, the company, and/or the customer? Would they be more willing to work more overtime if necessary or sacrifice time with their family? Would they treat our needs with more urgency and importance?*

As a leadership team, we recently reflected on how well we are doing as individuals when it comes to modeling respectful leadership behaviors and creating "respectful work processes." To build a culture of respect and empowerment, we try to address the basic needs of our people, then establish strong relationships that enable leaders to truly connect with people. When it comes to basic needs, we've found that we can easily overlook the basics. To us, these include: access to a suitable personal space, clean restrooms, clean break areas, an adequate work environment (i.e. safe, proper temperature, clean, appropriate lighting, organized). Meeting people's basic needs also includes providing people with the right training and the right equipment to do their job (i.e. access to tools and equipment in working order). A failure to address such basic needs indicates clear lack of respect.

Respectful work processes are also those that are developed with the entire team in mind. They treat every person, at all levels with dignity. These are processes that leverage the minds of floor technicians, for example, not just their hands. As leaders, we focus on instilling the belief (and demonstrating to our entire team) that *every* job has meaning and every individual has purpose.

In a recent kaizen activity we did to increase throughput in a value stream, one of our teams of support personnel embarked on a project to value stream map a series of processes, identify constraints, and solve problems. Historically, this project would have been executed in isolation from the factory. The floor technicians would have been an afterthought. They would have been viewed only as resources to adopt change and implement a desired future state. For this kaizen event, however, we tried a different approach. We brought in floor technicians from multiple shifts right from the start. The team spent time in a conference room and on the factory floor. They created an inclusive environment where everyone helped to create the value stream map and identify constraints. There was complete buy in to the problem and solution. Even better, throughout the process, people formed personal connections and team dynamics grew healthier and stronger. In the end, the feedback we received from the floor technicians was extremely positive. There was certainly a sense of engagement, respect, and empowerment. The result? Four straight weeks of record setting throughput.

When people have their basic needs met and are able to form strong personal connections, it's easier to develop work processes that are inherently respectful. Our cultural journey at Raytheon will continue, and it will require disciplined self-reflection and coaching at all levels of leadership to sustain the thinking we want to promote. But we're hopeful and excited about the future. During a recent reflection session, one of our leaders spoke up and shared, "I've started to realize that the discussions with my team had always been about me and what I needed from *them*… I'm starting to realize that I need to focus more on my team members and what they need from me." This is the type of comment that creates optimism and becomes the force multiplier to drive a contagious culture of respect at all levels.

When it comes to employee engagement, we know this to be true: people become engaged when they know and trust that you care.

Take Your Disgruntled Employee Seriously

By George Nelson

As a leader, there's one particular employee/coaching story that I can't quite forget.

It was August and one of our team members (let's call him Tom) was particularly disgruntled. He was a team lead responsible for the infrastructure of the plant. He had extensive knowledge of the plant and its operations, but his consistent complaint was that "critical events were not being shared with him." From his perspective, unreasonable and incomprehensible timelines were also being forced upon him. To me, it seemed pretty clear that he felt that his management team did not respect him enough to share the information he needed to be successful. This saddened me, but I also saw this as a challenge to improve Tom's attitude.

As a result of this dynamic, for months, Tom's initial response to any request for work was a firm "No", typically followed by outrageous timelines to begin to work on the requested work. He would explain that he already had a backlog of more important work to do and that he could not take on any new requests until the other work was completed. Again, since Tom had large amounts of institutional knowledge, managers generally believed him and would follow his exaggerated timelines. From where I stood, I thought we could change the behavior by building trust and open communication.

So what did I do? First, I decided to take Tom at his word and create a new meeting in which management could communicate to Tom all of the projects that were in various stages of the planning process. We also ranked all incoming projects in order of priority and target date for completion. This way Tom could see for months out what was coming up and what was a priority. We were also able to communicate the timeline, and he could let us know what he needed in order to complete the projects in time. Surprisingly, or perhaps unsurprisingly, this did not work! Tom still gave us outrageous timelines and complained about a backlog of various maintenance infrastructure work.

Next, I decided that Tom was using his knowledge and experience against us, so we decided to include another junior member of Tom's team in the meeting (let's call him Philip). Philip had less knowledge and experience than Tom, but he had enough so that Tom was not comfortable sharing outrageous timelines anymore. Slowly, his timelines became more realistic, and I was able to build trust with him by giving him extra time when he needed it and not holding him to a strict schedule where I could. I think Tom had a bad experience missing timelines with previous managers and used his sandbagging in a defensive manner to protect himself. Once I was able to have a secondary check on his estimates, I was able to build trust by being flexible where I could with timelines.

In order to create trust, both parties must feel vulnerable. With vulnerability, two people can learn to rely on each other and trust each other. It is a coach's job to build trust, and sometimes the coach must find a way to show that they can be trusted. The easiest way to show this is through engagement and openness.

Indeed, all of this taught me an important lesson: management means supporting value creators. Generally, a manager doesn't actually add value outside of supporting and directing the real, frontline value creators. This should be the priority of any manager, even when it's hard. The first step of a manager should be to engage the team member on a human basis to identify who somebody is and discuss how their role, expertise, and work fits into the company. For example, when I began my role at American Licorice, I accomplished this by spending at least an hour with each team member every week. During this time, I was able to listen to folks tell me about the issues they were experiencing on their job. It was important for me to look for easy wins where we could make people's jobs easier.

Building trust can only be done through engagement. You cannot trust someone you do not have experience with; it is human nature to distrust new people or at least see them as unreliable. Trust is *earned*, and it is earned through working together.

How to Recognize and Show Appreciation for the Real Value Creators
By Michael Walsh

One of the most gratifying things in life is being fully seen and genuinely appreciated for the value we create, whether that is on the shop floor, in our community, or among family and friends. Research tells us that the more specific the observation is about the match between "intention" and "impact," the more deeply it lands. In other words, when we give someone feedback, if the feedback is considered not just relevant, but authentic, people will hear it more.

"You did good," is less powerful than, "By interviewing people who were involved in process X and asking them to genuinely appreciate the many different perspectives involved in the value chain before facilitating a new flow chart, you helped so many people feel seen and heard. That work set all of us up to be open to more collaboration." The idea here is to be specific and give credit where due for where value has been created.

Why does this matter? Judith E. Glaser, the architect of Conversational Intelligence (C-IQ), suggests that *nine out of ten conversations* miss the mark in terms of people feeling truly connected at the first pass. What gets in the way of appreciation and gratitude landing the first time it's given? Beyond needing to be more specific, as leaders, we must be careful that our remarks are not experienced as judgmental, disingenuous, or dismissive.

In my experience as a leader and advisor in the management consulting sector, I've found it helpful to focus on the following when providing feedback to people:

Share Simple Observations

Framing your remarks as observable phenomena is a solid place to start. By this, I mean frame your observation in accessible language to the person/system in a manner that the majority of people witnessing the event will concur with its representation. There is a difference between, "Jane crossed her arms about five minutes into the discussion" (an observation) and "Jane seemed to be disinterested when she crossed her arms during the discussion," or "Jane was inappropriate in showing her disinterest in the conversation." The latter two statements are an interpretation of the situation rather than just a statement of an observation. You can sense the judgment.

Bear Witness

Bearing witness means standing under another person's umbrella to get a sense of what they see and experience in their world. Just the notion of bearing witness can make someone feel more seen and appreciated. By fully listening to a person share their narrative of a problem or

situation, you communicate that you appreciate what the other person is experiencing. You also communicate that you appreciate the *context* of their narrative. For example, in response to a team member (let's call him John) talking to you about 10 significant problems he may be dealing with—and his frustration that "it never seems to end"—you might offer, "It sounds like it has been an exhausting week." No interpretation or judgment, just reflecting back what came across in John's story. The power here is modeling empathy, giving someone the feeling that you get what they are experiencing. This is critical because empathy creates trust. You might follow this up with, "How are you managing with this?" It doesn't take much in the moment. You just want to create the experience for someone that they are being genuinely seen.

Assume You Have Blind Spots

As Glaser also reminds us, it is useful to understand the frequent blind spots that we bring to basic human interactions. In her 2016 book *Conversational Intelligence: How Great Leaders Build Trust and Get Extraordinary Results*, Glaser identifies the five most common blindspots:

- • Assuming everyone thinks like me
- • Under appreciating how feelings change our/their reality
- • Not recognizing "I am too fearful to empathize" in myself or others
- • Following prey to the belief "I remember, therefore I know"
- • The paradox of "I am listening, so I actually know what you mean"

When we fail to recognize these blind spots, we self-limit our ability to see the other person well and constrain our capacity to effectively honor those who create value. As leaders, we need conversational intelligence skills to deliver genuine, thoughtful, well-crafted observations and feedback to people.

Imagine if in aiming to provide feedback to our team members, we focused more often on sharing observations, bearing witness, and remembering our own blind spots… I believe if this approach were more common, we would experience much more curiosity and collaboration in our teams and organizations. I remember a recent mentor coaching session we ran. When we asked these coaches about their most impactful coaching experience, several folks said it was when they felt "genuinely seen for who they are" and "appreciated, not judged." When we asked what that did for them, people said it made them so much more willing to keep engaging with that other person.

The Lean Coaching Experience that Changed My Life, Not Just My Career
By Nicki Schmidt, RN, BN

> *I dedicate this piece to John Coughlin, David Verble, and Dr. John Long who, through their respect for people and humble mindset, shown through their actions, transformed my life forever. I am forever grateful!*

I started my nursing career in 1995, full of hope and desire to make an impact in the lives of my patients every day. After 10 years as an emergency room nurse working in broken processes and systems that presented every obstacle possible to doing my best work every day—and in a culture that didn't listen to the suggestions or ideas from those that actually did the work—I was burnt out, psychologically injured, and ready to leave nursing all together.

Then in 2005, something miraculous happened. A new CEO arrived at my hospital and introduced lean thinking and practice to organizational leaders. After a series of fortunate events, I became a lean coach and in 2006, started reporting to the Senior VP. It was his leadership that changed my life forever. During the time I reported to this VP, I never felt more valued personally and professionally. It was through his respect for people and humble mindset, modeled through his daily actions, that I (and many others) felt respected.

In the early years, I would meet with the VP for weekly one-on-one meetings. It was during these meetings that I felt truly valued for the first time in my career. I later learned that this was true for many of my colleagues as well. It didn't matter what was going on, this VP was never late and he never tried to reschedule our time. I had his *full* attention, no phone in sight, no checking his computer screen out of the corner of his eye. His phone never rang, and he didn't accept calls. I felt like this meeting of ours was a priority at the time and knew that my work was important to him and to our organization.

As for me, I often arrived at our meetings flustered and feeling defeated. I would unload whatever was on my mind. This work was new territory for me. I was learning new things and building new capabilities as I worked at dealing with wide scale change. As expected with this kind of change, I was also encountering resistance. As a result, I would show up with a lot of doubt and routinely questioned myself. But I remember I always left those meetings feeling confident in my next steps and my capability to carry them out. My coach never actually told me what to and I never felt "schooled". He would just ask me a lot of questions, prompt me to explore my own thinking, and then encourage me to trust myself and my abilities.

While my coach was the Senior VP, and for a time the interim CEO, I was a frontline nurse who was still really wet behind the ears in a new position. Still, I always felt equal in the relationship. He would intentionally involve me in important organizational and strategic decisions by saying, "I really value your insight and opinion. What are your thoughts about this?" It didn't matter who we were interacting with, he would frequently say things like, "I don't know," and/or "I

want to understand," or "Since you are closer to the problem/work, I want to hear from you." The effect was that people generally left those conversations feeling not just respected, but valued and empowered.

In his talk "Understanding Empathy," Simon Sinek says that "a leader's real job is not to be in charge, but to take care of the people in their charge." Bob Chapman, Chairman and CEO of St. Louis-based Barry-Wehmiller and author of *Everybody Matters,* says that leaders are "stewards of the lives entrusted to them every day." To me, this means leaders are responsible for ensuring that their team members leave their workplace every day, not only physically intact, but psychologically intact as well, feeling valued and capable of realizing their full potential. This is the ultimate form of respect that I believe leaders can show folks on the frontline who are creating value.

Looking back, I'm fortunate to have been the recipient of this kind of respect because I can also see how it has transformed not just my career, but my life. Living this coaching experience gave me a sense of purpose and inspired me to come to work every day. It also led to exponential personal and professional growth and even made me feel bliss. Respect for the value creating people on your team starts with a mindset of respect and humility. It shows up when leaders take responsibility, through their actions, to show those "in your charge" and "entrusted to you" that they are valued, that their time is just as important as yours, and that you believe in their potential and take responsibility to help grow their capabilities. Finally, it's about showing people that you need them and rely on their thinking to be successful as a leader and as an organization… When you can do these things as a leader, not only do people leave work physically and psychologically intact, but miraculous things happen. People solve problems much more effectively and individuals and entire organizations change.