

Not Everyone is Willing to Improve

By Mike Huszar

EXPERIENCE EXCELLENT IMPROVEMENTS

Over the past year we have seen excellent improvements in businesses throughout North America. It is always gratifying to see true transformation in an organization where we:

- Exceed business targets
- Drive the culture intentionally
- Build organizational capability to continue improving and sustain prior improvements

While we continue to be energized and inspired by client organizations that achieve results beyond anything they even imagined, we still find ourselves becoming disappointed and surprised by the organizations (and their leaders) that seemingly don't want to change.

RESISTANCE AT THE TOP

We desire greatly to help everyone as we focus on our mission to save manufacturing in North America. Why do we sometimes (unfortunately, it's not as rare as we would like it to be) encounter resistance by the top leaders? We believe there are numerous potential reasons for this, but we would like to focus on one particular situation that occurred in 2014. This situation was demonstrated in one of the manufacturing sites of a multiple site, Multi-national Corporation. We had already proven outstanding results in many locations and were asked by corporate to identify opportunities within one additional site. As we analyzed the opportunity, we literally found millions in annualized financial impact that was available to be mined. We were very quickly engaged but found that the leader of that site began to thwart our efforts at every turn.

This particular leader was actually placed into the position on an interim basis after the previous leader was removed for failure to achieve the objectives. We would call this leader a traditional leader who was looking for ways to improve the financial performance of the facility in traditional ways. Our focus was to expose problems at the process level in order to teach the teams how to permanently correct root causes, effectively achieving the financial impact while teaching the organization how to continue improvements without us. However, the designated implementation staff was continually withdrawn from the projects to attend traditional meetings and complete traditional reports – the same meetings and reports that did not achieve the business objectives prior to our arrival.

THREE ISSUES

We had already shown this leader how problems were hidden with excess capacity, excess space, excess inventory and excess labor (in other words the client was hiding his problems with cost). We had already explained how we would need to expose the problems by removing some of these excesses, and yet, as soon as we did, our process was sabotaged. Why? We spent a lot of time reflecting on this and determined that three issues were causing the most, if not all, of our challenges: Independence, Fear, and an Unwillingness for this leader to personally change his own thinking and actions.



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INDEPENDENCE

This leader already had experienced some level of success in his multi-decade history in organizations. He naturally wanted to experience success in this situation as well. So he set out to do things the way he had done them in the past. When the results were insufficient, he re-doubled his efforts and the pressure on his staff, presumably attempting to achieve the results through brute force. After all, if it had worked before, it should work again. Just try harder. Just work harder. Just apply more pressure. In discussions with him, he agreed that what we were doing would achieve far greater results, but he still wanted to do things his way. Of course, it would not reflect well on him if he outwardly sabotaged the projects, so he verbally agreed to proceed while letting his staff know that everything that was already underway still needed to get done IN ADDITION TO the work we now were doing with them. This rendered the team ineffective, as they were completely overburdened with conflicting priorities and activities.

FEAR

What if this outside group comes in and quickly realizes millions in annualized savings? This leader may be seen as incompetent. The previous leader was removed. He could potentially be removed as well. What the DRIVE team was implementing was so foreign to this new leader that he could not wrap his mind around it. It's not the implementation of tools but the embedding of principles that are completely foreign to his experience. What if this outside group takes all the credit for the improvements? Of course, we cannot achieve the tremendous results that we do without full participation of the leadership teams with whom we work. The client teams always get ALL of the credit for the improvements. His fear was unjustified.

UNWILLINGNESS TO PERSONALLY CHANGE

The changes we were making required sustainment through a lean management system heavily supported by leadership. With the redoubling of efforts to implement the traditional methods, there was no time for all of this "new" work. Besides, the new work was foreign, so it would take time to get good at things like Socratic coaching of process owners to mutually learn and solve problems. It would take a great deal of time to truly embrace all of the principles which are actually quite contrary to what this leader knows. So, no – he decided he would not do this. His perception of what we were asking him to do was too difficult, too time-consuming, and too frustrating to him personally. He thought he would need to just keep working on his own.

Our lead consultant at this location actually requested to be pulled from the assignment in order to help other locations within this company that embraced the approach, so that he could help the client company rather than fight the client company on a daily basis. Ultimately, that is what happened. Although we achieved sufficient financial results to call this engagement a "win," it was quite disappointing to all of us at DRIVE who knew how much opportunity was actually available to extract. This client had a wonderful staff of people who were initially motivated by what we were doing, then, seeing the lack of support from the plant leader, eventually became discouraged.

OUR HOPE FOR YOU

It is our sincere hope that we at DRIVE are never in a situation where we are not open to personally changing what we do in order to be more effective for our business or our clients' businesses. It is our sincere hope that we are always interdependent with our team and our clients' teams to achieve the results. It is our



sincere hope that we are never too afraid to try something new. And, alas, that is our hope for you. As you enter 2015, may you interdependently achieve phenomenal results as you “try” your way to success and make the necessary personal changes in your thinking and in your actions. This is a great time of year for some reflection in this area.

If you think there is an area where you have been independent, fearful, or unwilling to change and would like outside support from experts with years of experience driving change, Drive Inc. can help. We have experienced professionals who can coach your team through the process of change. For a no-obligation introduction meeting, please contact Paul Eakle at paul.eakle@driveinc.com or 865-323-3491.

