

A Lean Frontiers Whitepaper

Are You Walking the Lean Walk – or Just Talking the Talk?

Authored by David Veech
Executive Director of the Institute for Lean Systems (ILS)



About this article

The following article, *Are you Walking the Lean Walk – or Just Talking the Talk?*, was written by David Veech, Executive Director of the Institute for Lean Systems (ILS). After his involvement in the Inaugural Lean HR Summit (November, 2011), Veech felt compelled to author an easy-to-understand white paper covering one of the most crucial components of an organization's success: the self-efficacy of its' employees. Understanding that Human Resources -- more specifically, Human Resource Development – impacts the lean culture of any organization, (for good or bad), sets the stage for each reader's self-analysis of how they're progressing along their own lean journey.

For more information about the Lean HR Summit, visit www.leanhrsummit.com.

Are You Walking the Lean Walk -- or Just Talking the Talk?

Do your employees readily reach out and try new things on the job? Will they take on the challenge of improving their own work? How persistent are they in their efforts despite initial failures? Maybe it's time to stop blaming them – to assess whether you're actually leading them well by the example you set in your own lean journey.

People who do all three of these – try new things, strive to improve their own work, and persist despite initial failures -- are said to have high self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a psychological concept related to human confidence, but unlike global ideas such as self-esteem and self-confidence – both of which are very important for an effective workforce – self-efficacy is more task focused. Self-efficacy refers to a person's judgment, based on perceptions and available information, of his or her ability to perform a particular task. It is a feeling of power – specifically the personal power to affect the workplace. Ask yourself, "How strong is my own feeling of self-efficacy?"

Don't underestimate your own power to impact (and improve) your employees' work and life experiences; their personal improvements are likely to ultimately lead to improvement in your organization's bottom line. Because self-efficacy results in such powerful outcomes (improving work, initiative, and persistent effort), and because it is based on perceptions and information, it is critical to understand that, like self-esteem, leaders in organizations can take steps to improve the self-efficacy of your people. The basic building blocks of self-efficacy are not difficult to understand, and come with tools that have been available to leaders for years.

Mastery

As with other ideas related to confidence, a large piece of self-efficacy depends on competence, or more specifically, mastery. This begins with an expectation that the jobs we need people to do require them to be experts. Leaders have the responsibility to create meaningful jobs for people, and then develop their skills to the point where they become experts at those jobs. Note that this begins with the design of the job itself; how to accomplish the work required. The only way to become an expert in a task is to practice the task repeatedly in the same manner.

Standardized work, the set of instructions effective organizations use to accomplish work tasks, requires everyone assigned to a shared task to complete that task by following the same process and methods. By creating proper standardized work and using well-known and simple Job Instruction (JI) techniques, leaders, (again, that's you) can create experts out of anyone. ⁽¹⁾

Vicarious Learning

Standardized work based upon TWI (Job Instruction and Job Methods) provides a baseline, but the best way for people to learn is to watch and mimic other people. This doesn't happen by accident, though. By organizing into small teams and compressing the work space, you create an environment where team members can watch each other as they perform all the different jobs in the work space. Team members can discuss their performance with each other and together decide what improvement ideas to try. They can develop helpful, even constructive relationships within the teams, creating stronger bonds and stronger identity, elements critical to job satisfaction. Teams offer a host of benefits when they are properly formed and developed. This doesn't happen by accident; it happens because you intentionally design it to happen.

Coaching

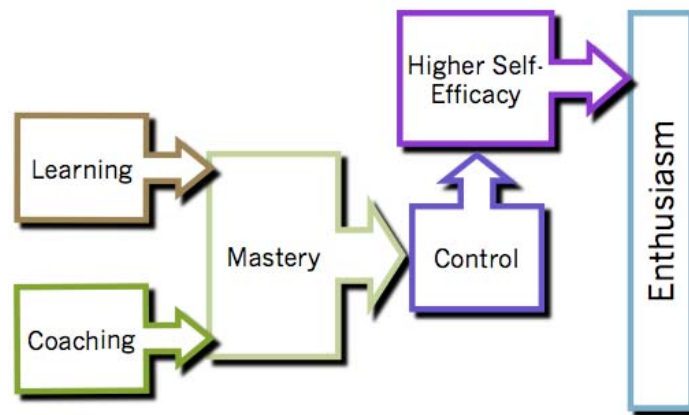
Beyond the basic team structure, many people need an additional resource to gain self-efficacy. A coach is responsible for teaching the standardized work to the team, providing performance feedback frequently and persuading the team members to keep trying things and continue thinking. Professional athletes recognize the value of a coach's perspective to improve their performance. Why would work teams (or executives) be any different? The effective coach must be 'the real deal' in order to be trusted. Since you are the coach, you must be seen as willing to try new things, continually striving to improve your own work and being persistent even in failure. That's a powerful role model your lean team can emulate.

Control

Giving people more control over their work within a defined set of rules as boundaries, (relative to the training they have received on very specific methods), further contributes to feelings of self-efficacy. In business terms, you must empower your workers. This is certainly not a new idea. When we did an informal analysis of initiatives introduced to businesses over the past 30 years, we found that nearly every initiative (around 50 different ones) included something about empowering the workforce. The problem, it seems, is in the execution and training of both leaders and workers; we don't actually follow through with empowering our workforce. This is understandable given the professional risk associated with empowering someone else to do something for which you are responsible. As your team's leader who walks the lean walk, get over it! When you let go (empower), you actually gain influence.

(1) Job Instruction is one of four key sectors of Training Within Industry (TWI); refer to the Training Within Industry Institute, (TWI-Institute.org) for more information.

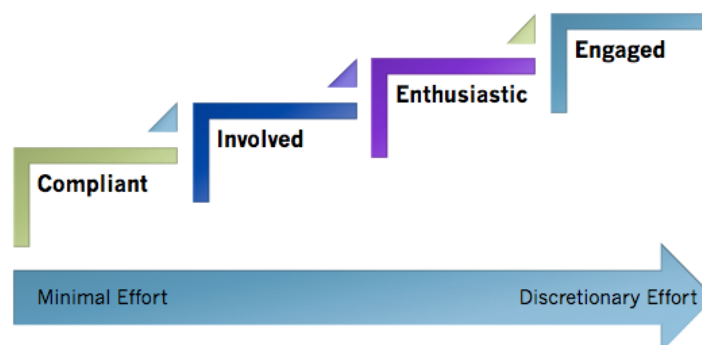
To be more effective, leaders need to deliberately teach people what they need to know to be properly empowered. This takes time, and in today's high pressure work environment it is often quicker and easier for you to simply do something yourself rather than teach and empower. You'll never truly be able to empower unless leadership *throughout the organization* works together to provide the time, or relieve the pressure, allowing teaching to occur. Beyond that, consider this: When you have developed experts through standardized work, organized them into a team, and given them a support mechanism (you, the coach) to help, your risk of failure is greatly diminished. Since the risk is low, you can confidently empower your team while you focus on more strategic improvements.



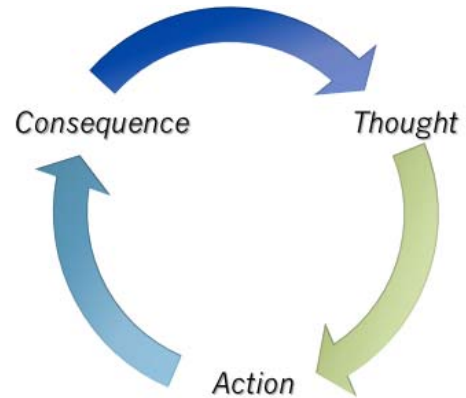
Behavior

What is really needed to be a highly effective competitive organization is for people to do things differently. People need to transition from a compliant state, where they simply do what we tell them to do -- checking their brains at the door -- to an engaged state where they constantly make improvements to their work and the workplace. In a compliant state humans tend to expend a minimal amount of effort required to maintain the status quo, (do as little as possible without getting in trouble). In an engaged state we offer extra effort, (often referred to as discretionary effort) to our jobs, doing whatever it takes to make the work successful and better. Obviously, the latter is what we want.

Look at this as a stair-step sequence progressing from compliant, to involved, to enthusiastic, to engaged with the spectrum of effort transitioning from minimal to discretionary as we progress. But the key question is, "How do we do that?"



Behavior is always preceded by a conscious thought and always followed by some consequence, either positive or negative. To get a permanent change in behavior we have to change the way people think. When we can accomplish a reframing of a worker's mindset about work, we can do anything. Changing the way a person thinks is the hard part. In the cycle of Thought-Action-Consequence, since we can't directly change the way people think, the only real places you can affect change are in Action and Consequence. Targeting a change in behavior in the Action phase of the cycle is the best place to aim. This is the very reason why TWI targets changing and improving behavior as it directly impacts the Action within the cycle of Thought-Action-Consequence.



In his book 'Change or Die,' Alan Deutschman presents three cases where groups of people had effectively and permanently changed their ways of thinking that resulted in permanent changes in their behavior. He summarized the process whereby they made these changes as Relate, Repeat, Reframe. If we can change the way people relate to one another, then give them a new set of rules and hold them accountable for repeat performance within those rules, over time they will become convinced that the new way of doing things is the right way or the only way to do things. This ideal future state is the goal, and it's only possible if you, as the leader, are already modeling it.

Relate

The team structure which promotes vicarious learning is consistent with the small groups or teams established in each of the *Change or Die* case studies. This structure of 4 or 5 people in a working team enables stronger bonds to form in the relationships among the team members. Assigning a team coach to provide support, challenges, and encouragement further supports this. Together, the coach and the team set goals, develop strategies and hold each other accountable for the things the team needs to accomplish.

Repeat

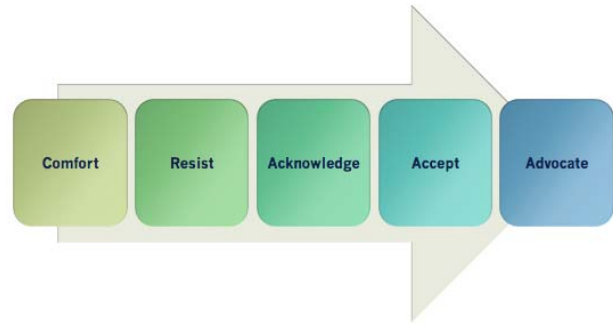
The team will work with support to create a set of standardized work for the functions they must perform. The standardized work becomes the new set of rules everyone must follow and everyone must enforce. As team members hold each other accountable to the standardized



work, the new rules are positively reinforced and skills improve, making team members more likely to repeat the behavior required and more confident about the work itself.

Reframe

As the individual skills improve toward mastery, and because the consequence of following the standardized work is positive reinforcement with better results, confidence levels increase and the mindset of the team member will begin to change. We typically progress in a predictable pattern that begins with comfort with the status quo, moves to resistance when a change is first proposed, to acknowledgement that the change is coming regardless, to acceptance that the change may not be a bad thing, and finally to advocacy, where once-resistant people are now strong proponents and effective teachers of others.



Giving team members more control as this transformation progresses will accelerate the progression from resistance to advocacy. Having them involved in multiple sectors of TWI training (JI, JR and JM) should ultimately result in the team members having full ownership of the standardized work package for their area, and freely changing it as they challenge each other to do the work better, faster, or with fewer resources.

If we, as change agents, focus only on the results of our change initiatives, we miss a huge opportunity to engage our team members and develop their skills for continuous improvement. Most tools have a technical outcome and a human outcome. The technical outcome might be reducing variation in a process by developing, training to the standard via JI, and enforcing standardized work. The human outcomes include expertise through repetitious learning, and the confidence that comes with mastery. Focusing on the technical will get things started, but to keep things going we have to remember, inform, and embrace that human outcome.

About Lean Frontiers

Lean Frontiers produces the highest quality events aimed at helping organizational silos understand their role in supporting the lean enterprise. By arming these silos with knowledge and tools, an effective cross-silo synergy is created for a truly lean enterprise. Events include the Lean Accounting Summit, Lean HR Summit, Lean IT Summit, Lean Sales & Marketing Summit, Lean Product & Process Development Exchange, and Lean Supply Chain Summit. Learn more at www.leanfrontiers.com.