



SUCCESS WITH LEAN : 10 TRAPS TO AVOID

by Bill Belt

You're implementing Lean in your company. Here are 10 remarks from your colleagues, remarks which are slightly erroneous and could keep you from succeeding.

1. **"Most of our products aren't repetitive, so we can't do Lean."** Individual items managed under Lean don't need to have repetitive demand, because they are members of the same product family. **Since the value stream at the family level is always repetitive, you can always do Lean.**
2. **"We're implementing Lean to increase productivity."** The basic objective of Lean is to reduce waste. According to Shigeo Shingo:

Time spent working = Value added time + waste.

By reducing time spent to combat waste or non-Quality in the process, more time will inevitably be spent adding value, and productivity- the ratio of value added time to total time spent working - will increase.

3. **"Reducing waste means reducing people."** Most people have an unshakable belief that Lean means getting rid of people. But **the waste is in the process, not in the people.** See point No. 2 above. Also, the people working in the process are the most qualified for identifying and finding ways to eliminate waste. Don't get rid of them; give them something more productive to do.
4. **"To reduce our lot sizes, we can change the parameters : it's faster."** One of my clients told me proudly, « We've reduced our lot sizes by 30%! »? Great! However, later in the day the Production Manager said that productivity had dropped by 11%! The lot sizes were reduced simply by modifying the software, without changing anything at all in the process. Lots of people pursue the cosmetic side of Lean, **the essence of Lean is in the process of improvement which leads to the result, not the result itself.**
5. **"To be able to pull production, you have to move the machines and create cells."** Not at all! **To pull production, the upstream operation has to be authorized to produce by a signal from the downstream operation.** This is easier to do with machines which are next to each other and operators in visual contact, but it's not an obligation.
6. **"We can't work with zero inventory, so we can't do Lean."** Lean doesn't mean zero inventory, but progressively less inventory: tightening product flow to discover the most urgent problem hidden by inventory. **Lean doesn't mean perfection but perfecting.**

7. **“With Lean, we can turn off the MRP II system which creates inventory by releasing large lot sizes.”** MRP II planning technology compensates for Lean worst defect : its inability to anticipate events, such as the planned number of Kanban call-offs by week. See Technical Newsletter No. 31. **Inventories are created to protect against non-Quality in the process**, such as long changeover times, scrap and late deliveries from suppliers.
8. **“In our factory, the Kanban releases a work order.”** To authorize production, Kanban—the signal from the customer to pull production—replaces the traditional work order which pushes products into inventory. Either products are pushed, or they are pulled: you can't do both at the same time! **The work order pushes, whereas Kanban pulls : to avoid pushing products into inventory, stop releasing work orders.**
9. **“Management will tell the Kaizen groups what problems to work on.”** The problems seen from Management's point of view are not the most urgent problems to be resolved as seen from within the value stream. **Tightening product flow, by removing one Kanban at a time, is the only impartial way to discover the next non-Quality problem hidden by inventory.**



10. **“Experts such as Lean specialists, gurus, sensei, etc. furnish the ideas to improve the process.”** This isn't the right type of person either psychologically or technically. To give examples, yes. To furnish advice, yes. To guide thinking, yes. But **deciding what to implement, should be done by people with operational responsibility for results.**