

EXCELLENCE IN THE SOUTHEASTERN REGION

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Sustainable Lean and Innovation: Transforming from the Inside Out

Whether you're leading a lean cultural transformation in a factory, a hospital or an innovation center, your most critical focus should be on people rather than tools and techniques. That's the view of Norbert Majerus, Goodyear's lean champion in research and development. "Some leaders, when they think of a lean transformation, create a new organization chart or issue a decree to implement lean, when it's all about engaging the people," he said. His presentation topic for the 2017 AME annual conference in Boston: "Transforming from the Inside Out."

Engaging People

Understand and develop a strategy for the change process – engaging all your associates in that process, counseled Majerus. "Teaching people the principles of lean and then engaging them and coaching them through the transformation – the 'inside out' idea – is the way to go," he said. "To effectively educate and equip associates for innovative improvement, you also need a plan or roadmap, aligned with your corporate culture and strategy."

Recognize improvements along the way, Majerus suggested. "You motivate people by celebrating small successes," he said. Majerus emphasized the need to plan for lean sustainability. "Many companies go through a lean transformation, and reassign the team or the leader before the transformation takes hold," Majerus said. "You need to give people a chance to sustain what they've built."

Collaboration and Customer Focus

Managing people in a lean environment requires a project-oriented, customer-focused form of organization. "It demands collaboration among everybody involved, with smaller, faster cycles of improvement and innovation," said Majerus. "Management needs to play a non-traditional role, a position of being helpers and coaches, participating in gemba walks and short huddles instead of encouraging long meetings."

Respect for people is a key ingredient in this leadership approach; Majerus described it as hard on the process, easy on the people. "If things go wrong, maybe the process isn't right, or it could be an equipment or other issue," he said. "You can get better ideas from people when you show respect for them." He added that a catchall/collaborative process for developing goals and metrics encourages engagement in reaching achievable targets. Recognizing innovative improvement initiatives is important; a simple thank you or team picture shared in the company network goes a long way.

Support by senior leadership is essential in successful lean transformation, Majerus continued. Humble, lean leadership is based on respect, teaching and using influence over authority. Majerus pointed out that the leadership traits of a humble senior company leader and a lean implementation leader are similar. He also advised that if company leadership wants to create a successful lean culture, they should not focus all their efforts on using lean to reduce operational cost. It is hard to engage associates in an initiative that may lead to cutting resources. At Goodyear, Majerus said, the initiative was focused on creating more value for the customer, "and we were all very surprised when we saw significant efficiency gains as a collateral," he added.

Editor's note: For information about AME regional events focused on people-centric leadership and workforce issues, employee engagement, lean implementation and other topics, check ame.org. Following the AME 2017 "Get Engaged" annual conference October 9-13 in Boston (ameconference.org), watch for details about tours, presentations, workshops and special interest sessions planned for the AME 2018 annual conference; the website ame.org/sandiego will be live 10/9/17. The Goodyear innovation center received an AME Excellence Award in 2016.

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