

## Living in an Upside Down World

By Norman Bodek

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Traditionally our focus has been to help our organizations to reduce costs, to improve quality, to reduce the timeline, to improve the flow, to improve productivity, to improve safety, to improve customer service, and to make a lot of money for the stockholders. Of course, that is why we have a job. We are told we are there to serve the interests of the company we work for. But, something is surely missing in the above scenario.

How about us?

Do we count?

A year ago, I visited a Toyota plant in Japan and noticed a young worker on the line installing about eight bolts onto every automobile. It looked like a very tedious and difficult job as the automobile was overhead and this required the worker to stretch. I walked over to the worker and spoke to a supervisor nearby. I asked, "How long will he have to do that job?" The answer was, "Well, he has a takt time of one minute. He has one minute to tighten all of the bolts. He will do that same job all day. He has 500 cars to work on today. He will probably do the same job for the next 3 to 6 months." I was shocked to hear this.

A few days later, I visited a Canon plant and was shown a totally different system. Canon a few years back had a conveyor belt with around 60 people on the line doing very limited and repetitive tests. The problem with the conveyor belt is that it goes at the speed of the slowest worker. Canon changed the system, ironically, getting help from ex-Toyota managers who helped Canon setup manufacturing cells. Now, believe it or not one employee, working in a cell, is able to build an entire copier by themselves. One worker is able to assemble a total copier with over 1000 parts in one hour all by themselves. She is able to assemble seven copiers in a day and the copiers are produced with very high levels of quality at 30% to 50% faster than the conveyor belt.

I saw one of these workers at Canon say, "At the end of the day I feel as if I have given birth to seven new babies. I am so happy to work here."

Often, when I keynote at a conference, I ask the audience, "What is your company's most important asset?" Virtually, everyone says, "People are our most important asset." I then ask, "If people are your most important asset then why aren't they listed on your balance sheet?" Isn't it ironical that we put inventory and machines on the asset side of the balance sheet but we don't put people. We don't encourage the investment in people, our best asset.

The miracle in my life has been to find the world's best management concepts to improve productivity and quality. I have been to Japan 75 times and found Dr. Shingo, Mr. Ohno and 50 other great Japanese teachers and managers who gave us all the wonderful Lean, quality and productivity tools. Even though I sold my company Productivity over ten years ago, I still am able to find the best of Japanese management. In the past, I focused finding things that improves the process like: SMED, Kaizen Blitz, Hoshin Kanri, 5S, visual factory, value stream mapping, TPS, CEDAC, quality control circles, TPM, cell design, poka-yoke, lean accounting, Andon, Kanban, and Quick and Easy Kaizen. Of all the things I discovered in the past the most exciting

to me was Quick and Easy Kaizen for it is a process to open the creativity lying within each person at work. Here within the average worker lives hidden potential to serve both the interest of the worker and the company. Those companies, that have been able to break through “the resistance of managers to change,” save on the average over \$4000 per worker per year. And just imagine how thrilled and excited people become when management listens to their ideas and allows them to implement the solutions to the problems they find.

There are two pillars to the success of Lean: Just-In-Time and “Respect for People.” Most practitioners of Lean know how to implement the first pillar but very few understand and apply the second. Allowing workers to stop the line whenever they detect a problem or when they see a possible problem gives workers tremendous respect. Allowing workers to identify problems and to creatively find solutions to implement those solutions, on their own, also gives workers tremendous respect. But still something very important is still missing.

Shigehiro Nakamura, a Japan Management Association’s consultant, has, this last year, been teaching four graduate students and myself, through Skype, the very latest Japanese manufacturing practices. One very exciting concept comes from Takashi Harada who was a junior high school teacher. He discovered a very powerful new technique to help students select one goal to succeed at in life and to develop a very clear path to attain that goal. For example, when Harada started to teach, his school was rated lowest in the city but afterwards 13 of his students won gold medals in track and field. This is like winning an Olympic gold medal in Japan. And, the whole school was uplifted both academically and athletically to become one of the best schools in the city.

Last December, I flew to Japan to meet Mr. Harada, now consulting with him industry, and he agreed to write a new book with me to introduce his method to America. I am thrilled and feel very grateful that once again I am able to bring to the West the very best of Japanese management practices.

The Harada method is surely the “icing on the cake,” teaching us that to have an outstanding organization we must first focus on every person being outstanding and not limiting people to routine repetitive tests. Harada demonstrates that there is a method, a clear way, to help people become “experts” in what they do.

It is time for us to **Right Size the World** -- to put people first, feeling as though they are valuable assets and vital parts of our organizations. You can do it!

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Norman Bodek, author of How to Do Kaizen, will lead two study missions to Japan this coming September 10 and October 15. The first study mission will be with the Shingo Prize and the second with the Lean Accounting Summit, both will have workshops with Takashi Harada.