A Kata Introduction: Football Analogy

by Bob Zaruta, President/CEO, NWIRC

In this and future editions of The Advisor, readers will have the opportunity to be introduced to or expand their understanding of kata. During an event on December 7th in Erie, attendees will have the opportunity to gain the insights of Mike Rother, engineer, researcher and author of several books including Toyota Kata, and experience the Improvement Kata in a hands-on simulation. Also in December, educators in our region will have a similar opportunity to participate in a Kata in the Classroom simulation to learn how to teach students this pattern of scientific thinking. And, in early 2018, stay tuned to NWIRC for more including Coaching Kata!

So why all the attention and hype for kata? To help answer that question, perhaps an overview of what kata is, with some terminology and applications, are in order. According to Wikipedia, kata is a Japanese word describing detailed patterns of movement practiced either solo or in pairs. Karate kata are executed as a specified series of a variety of moves, with stepping and turning, while attempting to maintain perfect form. Traditionally, kata are taught in stages. Previously learned kata are repeated to show better technique or power as a student acquires knowledge and experience. It is common for students testing to repeat every kata they have learned but at an improved level of quality.

I had the privilege and pleasure of coaching students in grades 7 through 12 in the game of football. My coaching staff and I used ‘football kata.’ At every practice, our players went through numerous drills for each position. Within each drill, the ideal form and movement, the ‘how’ we wanted our players to perform, was broken down into multiple steps consisting of specific actions within each step. To start, players learned and repeatedly practiced step one, then repeated step one as they practiced the actions of step two. The process continued through each step until the entire drill was completed. As an example, a defensive back filling a lane and looking to make a straight on tackle would practice breaking down in stride as they approached the ball carrier with their feet spaced but within the frame of their shoulders. Next step, the player practices lowering his body into a proper contact and tackling position with helmet up and facemask aimed at the opponent’s jersey number. Next step, as contact is made, the player would practice sliding his helmet to the opponent’s side while thrusting both arms up under the arm-pits of the runner with hands open and palms pressed against the back of the ball carrier at the shoulder blades. Final step, the player practiced accelerating through the tackle aiming for a place on the ground behind the ball carrier. Again, progressing through and building upon each step of very deliberate learning and practicing.

This football analogy speaks to the Improvement Kata. Regardless if the Improvement Kata is in karate, football, or manufacturing, improved performance is realized by breaking down each critical skill (task) and by teaching the “student” through deliberate learning and practicing. And, by educating the student as to why each activity within a step is important and by reinforcing the how and why through effective Coaching Kata (a topic for another day). All with the end goal being a student, player, or employee functioning at a master level like it was ‘second nature’. Most would agree that no manufacturer has done a better job of implementing lean manufacturing and building a culture of continuous improvement than Toyota. Mike Rother’s research of Toyota revealed that the company excelled at growing and engaging its people by developing their thinking skills. In short, by combining simple scientific striving patterns with practice routines called kata, Toyota’s employees became everyday scientists better equipped to achieve the next improvement performance metric or goal. Scientific thinking is a life skill that anyone can learn by using kata and can be used everyday in whatever we do.

Bob Zaruta  
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Building Scientific Thinking Habits by Practicing Kata

Mike Rother
Engineer, Researcher, Teacher, Author

Lean training seemed fairly straightforward in the 1990s, as it focused on tools and general concepts. But deeper study of Toyota showed us that its visible tools and practices are built on an invisible, scientific way of thinking. At Toyota, you get challenging goals and you experiment your way toward them—adding to knowledge as you take steps—instead of trying to decide your way to them. That’s a way of thinking and acting you have to learn, because it does not come naturally to humans. The default way we think about problems often involves jumping to conclusions—not scientific thinking—because the brain doesn’t like uncertainty. The unconscious part of our brain takes bits of surface information, quickly extrapolates to fill in blanks, and gives us a false sense of confidence. And then we start making costly mistakes.

However... we do have the power to change our thinking. Deliberate Practice to Change Habits

Changing mindset involves weaving new neural pathways, by practicing a new way, which over time replaces old pathways. Want to lose weight? Practice new patterns of eating and exercise. This raises the bar on educating ourselves to think more scientifically, since books, seminars or workshops alone probably won’t change our habits. There are many practice guides for learning how to play music, cook, paint, play a sport, play chess, and countless other pursuits, yet surprisingly few for the useful skill of scientific thinking. The new Toyota Kata Practice Guide (McGraw-Hill, 2017) aims to change this.

Some Ingredients

We have a pretty good idea of what does work for changing habits of mind—daily practice sessions of some new routines, in the real workplace, with corrective feedback from a coach. Every time you think or do something you’re more likely to do it again.

First, we’ll need some model of scientific thinking, in components or steps that can be taught one by one. Second, there should be a coach who can provide corrective feedback to the learner, so the learner practices and internalizes the right new patterns. Finally, we need some specific routines to practice, especially for beginners. These ingredients are exactly what the Toyota Kata Practice Guide provides.

1. The Improvement Kata is a four-step scientific pattern that learners follow to experiment their way through obstacles and achieve tough goals.

2. The Coaching Kata is a pattern for teaching the Improvement Kata. It helps coaches practice sensing how the learner is thinking and giving effective feedback, in daily interactions called “coaching cycles.”

3. But wait, there’s more. There are small, specific practice routines—called Starter Kata—for each step of the Improvement Kata. This is where beginners start and is an entryway to developing new skills and changing your mindset.

Starter Kata Help Us Build New Habits

Practicing kata has been utilized for centuries as a way of preserving effective skillsets, transmitting them from person to person, and building effective teamwork. The goal is to master each Starter Kata’s fundamental pattern so you can then build on and adapt it under a variety of circumstances as a reflex, with little thought or hesitation.

Starter Kata are like a beginner musician practicing a musical scale. That’s their role. You don’t stick with playing a musical scale forever, you build on what you learned from practicing it. And the next learner who comes along then begins with the same Starter Kata. This is particularly useful if you want to build a shared way of thinking and acting—a deliberate culture—in a team or organization, because everyone begins with the same basics.

Ultimately, though, kata are not the important thing. What is important are the skills and mindset that practicing them imparts, which you and your organization can use to achieve your particular goals.

Mike Rother is an engineer, researcher, and teacher. He’s the author of several books, including Toyota Kata, The Toyota Kata Practice Guide, Toyota Kata Culture, and Learning to See.

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Side Note: Mike Rother will present at the Improvement Kata Workshop and Luncheon scheduled in Erie on December 7th from 10:00am-1:45pm at the Bel Aire Clarion Conference Center. Seating is limited and the cost is $65. While in our region, Rother will also present a free program to educators, Kata in the Classroom (KiC), for participants to practice Kata exercises and learn how to share with their classroom or group. KiC programs are scheduled in Meadville on Dec 6 and Erie on Dec 7th. See www.nwirc.org/events for details on all of these programs.

From Service to Sales
by Lisa Pustelak, Employee Development Specialist
LEDGE Enterprises

There are an abundance of customer service representatives that have to meet certain sales metrics in order to retain their position in today’s ever changing and competitive marketplace. Some people can naturally adjust and survive; the majority however, hangs on tight to the mindset that “I can’t sell” and either struggle or end up being let go. Leading and managing a team of people with a title of customer service, with a responsibility to sell, can be a challenge.

The first reason why customer service oriented employees have a difficult time selling is that they don’t believe they can. People create beliefs that selling is something you do ‘to’ someone versus something you do ‘for’ someone. Selling is a swear word for some. This comes from the myths of the ‘used car salesman’ approaches that have been around for years.

In Daniel Pink's book, To Sell is Human, he does a fantastic job of explaining that we all sell no matter what our role is. Parents sell to their children, teachers sell to students, lawyers sell their desired verdict to a jury, and doctor’s sell remedies to patients. He explains, “We’re moving other people to part with resources—whether something tangible like cash or intangible like effort or attention—— so that we both get what we want.” Mr. Pink proves that no matter our profession, we all do a certain amount of ‘selling’.

The first thing you should work on with your team is mindset. Do NOT allow anyone to voice the words “I can’t.” This is one of my favorite concepts to help people understand. The words “I can’t” indicate you are not in control and typically several excuses will follow those two words. Have them replace “I can’t” with “I won’t.” Try this for yourself for anything, not just selling and you will find it is a powerful tool. By using “I won’t” it eliminates any excuses, now it’s a choice. My guess is most people on your team, if they are the right people for the job, will realize quickly that they are choosing not to sell a product or service.

The second reason is that they don’t know how to sell. Once the mindset is on the right track, start looking at the skill levels on your team. Do your people know HOW to sell? Do you have a sales process that can be easily duplicated? Do they use it? Do they greet customers properly? Do they know how to do proper discovery? Do they know how to offer a solution or close a sale? Are they asking for help and support with in your company and study the plethora of information on selling in the manufacturing industry?

Leading customer service representatives to becoming superstar sales professionals will take time, but it’s something you CAN do! As Martin Luther King Jr. said, “You don’t need to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.” It takes time to transform a team.

Take that first step today and lead your team to the right mindset around selling.

Lisa Pustelak is an Employee Development Specialist who helps manufacturing companies increase sales, improve customer service, and boost employee morale.

Another Lean Together™ Kick-Off

Another Lean Together™ Working Group for Operational Excellence started last month in St Marys. The program focuses on concepts from the book 2 Second Lean by Paul Akers. The kick-off meeting featured Kelly Goodsel, President/CEO of Viking Plastics, to share their journey.

(L-R) Bob Zaruta (NWIRC President/CEO); Craig Corsi (Lean Together Facilitator); Kelly Goodsel (Viking Plastics President/CEO); and Tom Weible (NWIRC Strategic Business Advisor)
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UPCOMING EVENTS

Improvement Kata Workshop & Luncheon
Dec 7
Location: Erie
Author Mike Rother brings the popular Toyota Kata topic to life and illustrates how it’s used in teams, organizations and even in your life. The program includes a presentation on practicing Kata for continuous improvement, a 50-minute simulation, and networking luncheon.

Lean Champion Certification
Jan 9, 16, 23, 30
Location: Erie
This four-part series offers hands-on training and individual assignments specific to your business. Sessions include principles of lean, value stream mapping, 5S, key performance indicators, Kanban, Kaizen, and setup reduction.

Kata- 10 Hour Training
Feb 6, 7, 8
Location: Erie
Learn and practice the Improvement Kata and Coaching Kata with expert guidance in establishing current and target conditions, identifying obstacles, and choosing ideas for PDCA (plan, do, check, act) cycles. The majority of the time in this learn-by-doing program is spent practicing with mentoring by a TWI Institute Certified Kata Trainer.

Root Cause Analysis
Feb 8
Location: Erie
Root Cause Analysis (RCA) is a methodology for finding and correcting the most important reasons for quality and performance problems. Don’t just put a bandage on the problem. Discover a disciplined approach to problem-solving and add RCA to your quality management toolbox.

For more information or to register for training, visit www.nwirc.org