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Deploying a Lean Champion Their Role and Success Factors

Companies who have a thriving lean culture are often driven internally by a dedicated champion. Someone who exemplifies the drive, leadership, training, and commitment to lead a company to improve the organization's operational performance as well as increase total customer satisfaction. Lean champions are often a critical part of a lean initiative, providing the knowledge, vision and dedicated focus required to maintain a continuous improvement environment. Lean champions typically have varied responsibilities and can come from different areas of the organization. Often times the individuals have a role within the company that represent the operational side of the business. It's not uncommon to find a vice-president or general manager spearheading the organization's lean efforts but often times champions come from the middle management to supervisory levels of the business. Some may contend that it may be harder to affect change from these positions but what I've found to be most crucial is the person's ability to relate to those he or she is leading. Successful lean leaders are people who have gained the respect from both upper management and the front line workers.

Champions are certainly more than process improvement leaders. They're often effective project managers who understand the underlying business issues that lean needs to address. Additionally, they set and maintain the goals of the improvement projects, making sure that they are aligned with the overall business objectives. They act as teachers, educating the entire organization on the importance of lean. They are also facilitators, helping to address organizational issues and keep lean initiatives on schedule.

An important element of being a lean champion is the ability to motivate others. Above all, successful lean champions seem to work well with all levels of employees and navigate through the organizational roadblocks. An effective lean champion is someone who has a clear vision, good communication skills, and a relentless drive to implement change that will improve everyday work life. Teaching the lean concepts and tools are simple, driving organizational change is nearly impossible without a lean champion.

Companies who are in their infancy of their lean efforts have the most need for a champion to help them through the process. Seeking outside consultant assistance for training, coaching and guidance in the development of the lean champion is the preferred approach to get started. Engage with a lean expert to provide classroom knowledge-base, but more importantly learn how to successfully facilitate improvement projects. The most effective way to accomplish this is to host an organized event(s) under the guidance of a lean coach to allow the champion to gain practical lean experience within their own work environment. You can also join a working group where companies are learning and collaborating on lean concepts together.

One very important point to consider is that the lean champion alone cannot be successful. Success is accomplished through strong organizational commitment, and engaged workforce, and unwavering support.

