



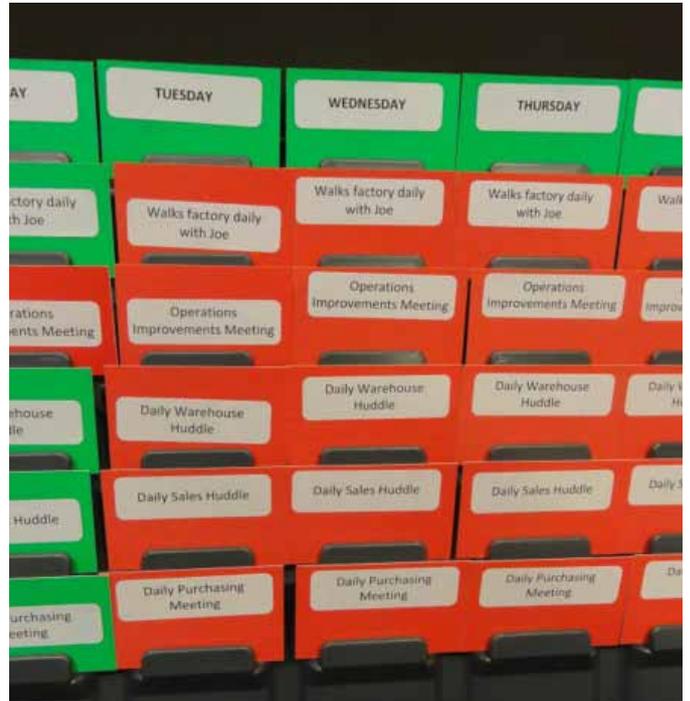
The seven habits of a highly effective Lean leader

Strong consistent leadership is essential to the success of Lean just as it is to every major change or initiative that your business is going to attempt. Effective daily team meetings are a key element of Lean daily leadership, as explained by Tim McLean.

How do you become a Lean Leader? Firstly, you can't change who you are as a person – your underlying values, your personality. A lot of managers attempt this and end up simply coming across as unconvincing or worse, untrustworthy. So you can't change who you are, but you can change what you do. That is, you can change your behaviours, which is where habits come in. We all have habits – automatic behaviours that we demonstrate without thinking. The key to being a successful leader and particularly a Lean leader is to demonstrate positive leadership habits.

So what are the habits you need?

1. Going to the Shop Floor – this is not just going for a walk and a chat once in a blue moon. Value is created on the factory floor and therefore manufacturing leaders (and leaders in any industry) need to spend time with their front line employees every day. This means taking time to observe the process, and provide constructive feedback on what you observe.
2. Notice performance – the purpose of visual controls and visual management is to visualise the status of production and highlight abnormalities. However this is only effective if leaders notice these abnormalities. If you walk past and ignore, for example, an overflowing FIFO lane, equipment not in the correct location, a large stock of defective products or empty kanban locations you are sending a message to your people that these issues are not important. Your people will respond to what you see as important and therefore by ignoring things that are not right (we call it “passive acceptance”) you will fatally undermine your production system.
3. Ask Why Five times – as leaders and managers we often see our role to direct and control. Leaders need to see their roles as coaches, teaching their teams to improve the process. To do this means focusing on asking questions rather than giving orders. However when you ask “why”, be prepared to go beyond the superficial answer (“the operator made a mistake”) to get to the root cause. By doing this you learn the real opportunities in your business, but more importantly you teach your team member to go beyond the obvious and look for the root cause of problems.
4. Meet every day – There is no substitute for regular structured communication with your team. Every leader should meet with his or her team (direct reports) every day. This provides an opportunity to review performance, plan for the next day and solve problems. This meeting needs to be structured with an agenda, occur at the same time each day and take no longer than 10 minutes. We would usually suggest this meeting occurs standing up around a white board that displays the team's key performance indicators and other information.
5. Demonstrate standard work – we don't think that managers can break their day up in to blocks and structure their day in the way an operational task might be standardised. However for routine tasks, leaders need to demonstrate a standard process. This might be a standard way to run meetings, a standard approach to a shop floor walk, or use of 5S to organise your office. People follow the example of their leaders, so if you want your people to follow standardised process, then you need to do so yourself.
6. Think in value streams – A key plank of Lean thinking is the idea of a value stream. This means seeing the organisation as the customer sees it, as a sequence of value adding processes delivering a product or service to the customer. If you want to really drive improvement through your value streams then you really need to make sure that your organisational structure, your business metrics and your personal focus is consistent with this.
7. Summarise it in One Page – Expect that all major projects initiatives, updates are presented to you on a single A3 sized piece of paper. This is a great tool to encourage your team to focus on what is important rather than presenting “death by powerpoint” or a 100 page report that no-one reads. However if you expect people to communicate to you in A3s, also be prepared to communicate your own projects and strategies in A3 format.



A task board like the one pictured can be a great way to ensure that you maintain your good habits. This one includes regular daily leadership meetings (referred to as “huddles” by this company).

If you establish each of these habits then you are going to give effective support the change going on in your business. The most important thing is to be consistent. You need to therefore make sure that you are consistent over time in your messages and your approach. The key to forming and maintaining good leadership habits is repetition, so that they just become a natural way of doing things for you. This repetition then creates trust with your team as they know how you are likely to behave and the things you are likely to do every day.

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