

My Takeaway from 2014 TWI/HR Summit:

By Jaclyn Dorsey

Before going to the TWI/HR Summit, I was asked to write a summary of what I learned at the Summit. During the two day Summit I kept thinking to myself, “What would I say if someone asked what the Summits were about?” I was racking my brain and then saw the answer right there on a banner hanging right in front of me on stage- “creating a CULTURE of lean thinking”. For me, the key word of this phrase was culture. I looked up the meaning of culture and found two definitions pertaining to our summits: development or improvement of the mind by education or training; the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group.

Furthering on these two definitions and tying them together, our summits should be meeting the criteria of both. The focus should begin with a set of beliefs of a particular group fixated on improving the mind by training. If we were to have a successful summit, each presentation would promote “creating a culture of lean thinking”. Part of this is clearly being met by having the training sessions. The next step is to determine if this was promoting lean thinking. This tied directly into Tracey Richardson’s presentation.

While sitting in on her session, she spoke about the “Line of Sight”. The point of Line of Sight was to track if our job in a company is “value-added to the company- does it relate to the company’s goals and key performance indicators”. This meant to me that each presentation should reflect the ultimate goal of the summit. As I examined the notes I took during the summit, I noticed four consistent themes, or beliefs if we go back to our definition, that each of the presenters discussed to promote a lean culture.

The first belief I took away from the presentations was implementing standardization in the business. Tracey’s presentation not only covered the “Line of Sight”, but it also spoke of incorporating the “Line of Sight” as a daily standard. If you’re working on a project, a standard must be set that lines up with the company’s “line of sight”. This is a way to determine if there’s a gap taking place from the company standard. It quickly identifies if any tasks or behaviors deviate from the standard. Standardization is ongoing and helps uphold a belief system that is a part of the lean culture.

Not only was Tracey able to touch on this point, but keynote Alan Robinson also brought this point up during his session. One of the ways he discussed standardization was by turning certain tasks into a daily practice. One example of this was by setting the expectation for employees to be problem-solving daily. Employees that display this behavior will be able to further the company goals. If this isn’t happening daily, it will deviate from the standard that should be met and the company won’t be trying to continuously improve. Creating a standard upholds the principles of the lean belief system and produces an environment where this is the expectation.

The second belief I noticed highlighted the importance of visual management. Katie Labeledz did an excellent job of explaining this during her presentation. She defined visual management as “a set of techniques that makes operation standards visible so that workers can follow them more easily”. Simple things such a stoplight or scoreboard for a sporting event are examples of visual management we can all relate to. This helps us identify irregular conditions easily and also reduces waste. Having these visual flags promotes a lean culture.

Sarah Sheffield also highlighted this during her presentation. She emphasized that her company recently implemented visual performance into their business structure. That way, leaders are able to check results and adapt as needed. In other words, visual management can be used as an evaluation mechanism. An example she gave of this was to create idea boards and prioritize them with who/what/when. It runs along the theme of Plan, Do, Check, Act. This is an additional way that idea boards build a lean culture which ties in with another belief from the Summit.

The third belief I noticed was to uphold an idea system within a company. Alan Robinson noted that small ideas over time make a big impact. The little details matter. A simple way of doing this was the bar example he gave during his presentation. This idea came from one of the bartenders. The bar switched to dropping the recyclables during their shift rather than leaving the bar to take them outside. As a result, this saved the company money. It was easy to implement with less resistance and risk. This idea was also unique to the company so that the competition couldn't feasibly copy this idea. As Jay Reardon put it, "If you get people thinking, they'll give you answers."

Dean Schroeder was another keynoter that emphasized the importance of creating an idea system in the workplace. He maintained the significance of leaders seeking out and listening to ideas. The reasoning behind this was because most of the positions held at the top level may not always be producing the best and most knowledgeable workers. Typically, successful managers are the ones focused on networking and politics whereas the most effective managers may not be the ones getting the promotions because their focus is on developing people. Some solutions to this problem are holding regular training for ideas, and not lessening the ideas of others. Idea-driven leaders should be humble, improvement oriented, focused on people, and stay in touch with front line workers. As Katie Labeledz put it, an idea system looks to always make things better and add value to the company.

The last belief that I noticed was the importance of developing people. Ed Manzo pointed out that there's a difference between merely training people and trying to develop them. Training is merely a process with a beginning and end, whereas developing people is ongoing and always looking for improvement. This type of behavior is an environment that begins with the leaders of a company. Sarah Sheffield's company has a talent assessment to bridge any leadership gaps with developing people. Sam MacPherson stressed businesses to look for leaders that can not only train but develop people as well. It can start with yourself- lead by example and always be directly involved.

Overall, it seemed to me that every presentation not only brought something new to the table, but maintained consistent learning points on the concepts of lean. This showed me that our presenters and thought leaders are on the same page when it comes to creating a culture of lean thinking. It was an enlightening introduction to the lean community for me. I look forward to increasing my knowledge in the upcoming summits. I hope to obtain an even higher knowledge of what it truly means to implement lean to a company, the differences between lean, six sigma, kaisen, and how they are integrated with one another.