

## Take your Opportunity

Lean is often about momentum, building momentum and keeping it going. How does a company start to join the dots and keep going? Often the challenge is not about getting the perfect first step but taking any step that gets you going in the right direction. After all if you have failed to make any progress in the last few quarters speed is more important than the starting point.

### **Situation**

In this example the client had found its self in a difficult position. It had grown rapidly, moved from several smaller operations into a new larger location but was still working to the old practices that each previous location had employed. At the same time competitors were cutting lead times as the clients lead times had increased. The risk was that growth would stall and the company would contract.

Several years earlier the Plant Manager had had to lay off staff an experience he told me he did not want to ever repeat, but was recognized unless something changed he would likely have to.

### **The Process**

We started off by value stream mapping the current process. This gave everyone the opportunity to express their concerns. And as those concerns were clearly expressed, the challenge was to keep discussion to the process problems and stop them getting personal. We moved through the process steps collecting good data and a long list of issues. Around the 30% point we tackled a cleaning process. Again issues were raised by the processes customers but at this point discussion opened up and started to ask why something seen as so simple was difficult to carry out. At that point Billy who fed the clean process said in his hard Scottish accent “if it’s so much bl@@@dy work for you we’ll do it next time”..

The next week I asked Billy how it went. His response was “It only took us an extra 10 minutes, not really a problem, do it anytime”. The Cleaning crew quickly fed back that it had saved them 4 hours per batch, which meant they got material to the next process in record time.

Quickly we worked at formalizing this new way of working and identified a few other opportunities to make similar changes Results

### **Results**

The result was multifaceted, two departments that had not been working together started to collaborate. The ability to make things better was recognised by the mapping team and empowered them. The Lead time started to come down, over the course of the project it would reduce by over 20% approaching best in industry. And the company is still implementing continuous improvement ideas that save it millions more each year.