

BREAKTHROUGH

Lean Implementation & Training Resource Publication
Brought to you by Lean Manufacturing Solutions Partnership, Inc.

THE PARABLE OF THE WOULD-BE CRAFTSMAN

By Aaron Styles

DUPLICATING TOOLS TO SUCCEED

Once upon a time there was a man (we'll call him Bill) who decided that he wanted to become a craftsman of fine furniture. Not only did he desire to make it his trade, he wanted to become known as the finest furniture craftsman in the world. To this end, he set out to benchmark the best craftsman in the world. After doing extensive research, he determined exactly who the best furniture craftsman in the world was. This man (we'll call him Tom) made furniture of incredible quality and durability at a competitive price. What was especially outstanding was that Tom made huge profits, to the point that not only were his products considered the best, but he was also by far the most wealthy furniture craftsman in the world.

Bill approached Tom and asked him if he might spend some time with him observing his business. To Bill's surprise and delight, Tom immediately agreed. When Bill came to Tom's shop, he noticed that Tom had tools that Bill had never heard of before (since Bill had no experience in manufacturing of any kind). Bill quickly began writing down the names of the tools. A lathe, a band saw, a table saw, a planer, a router, and more. He asked Tom how the tools worked and Tom gladly showed him. Bill noted the details of the furniture Tom made so as to be sure he could reproduce it exactly. Tom even told him where he could buy tools of his own. Bill said to himself, "Tom is a fool! Now he has shown me all the secrets to his success! All I have to do now is run out, buy all these tools... the exact same ones Tom has... put them in my shop, and start using them just as Tom uses his. With the same tools I can produce furniture as good as Tom, perhaps even better!" He thanked Tom for his time and rushed off to call the equipment and tool suppliers, making orders to set up his shop exactly as Tom had.

Soon, the day came when all the tools had arrived and had been installed in Bill's shop. Bill was no dummy. He knew he needed to learn how to use the tools, so he hired a consultant. The consultant (we'll call him Jim) was particularly impressive to Bill because he seemed knowledgeable about all the tools and could demonstrate their use readily enough. Jim had spent years studying Tom's work and knew exactly how Tom used each of his tools and exactly how Tom made all of his furniture. What's more, Jim had a set implementation plan that, he explained, was the perfect sequence for implementation of a furniture building enterprise like Tom's. Bill worked with Jim, following his implementation plan... even receiving a certification as a master craftsman. He was now ready to begin making furniture.

At precisely that time, he got his first order. A customer ordered a mission-style bookcase. Bill enthusiastically began using his tools, to make wooden furniture components just as he had seen Tom make them. His excitement grew as he went from tool to tool making one beautiful, high quality component after another. Finally, came the assembly process, resulting in a... Victorian-style china cabinet. It was as gorgeous a piece of furniture as Bill had ever seen and he couldn't believe he had made it. Bill was surprised however when his customer refused to purchase the cabinet. "I ordered a mission-style bookcase, not a Victorian-style china cabinet! I'm taking my business elsewhere," exclaimed the disgruntled, would-be customer.

Bill was crestfallen. He had implemented all the tools; he had followed the guidance of the consultant and the result of his work looked impressive. In so doing, he had spent his life savings.

Page 1/2

BREAKTHROUGH

Lean Implementation & Training Resource Publication
Brought to you by Lean Manufacturing Solutions Partnership, Inc.

THE PARABLE OF THE WOULD-BE CRAFTSMAN

By Aaron Styles

ROADMAP TO GUIDE THE TOOLS

He described to Tom his experiences, how he had set up his shop exactly as Tom had, how he had hired Jim to provide him guidance in how to use the tools, how he had made the components just as Tom had and better in some cases, but that the result was a product that displeased his customer.

Tom sat silent and reflected for a moment. Finally, he asked to see the drawings Bill had used to build his furniture. "What are drawings?" asked Bill. Tom replied, "They are the plans that you use to guide the use of your tools, so that you build each piece correctly and it fits in as an integral part of the furniture, meeting the needs of your customer." "I've never heard of drawings before! Why didn't you tell me about them?" exclaimed Bill. "You never asked," replied Tom. Tom went on to explain, "It all begins with the customer. All of us are in this business to make money. Therefore, your business need is to sell something to the customer, so you have to understand what they want. Once you understand what the customer wants, you design the furniture and create drawings to explain the design... to satisfy the customer... in order to meet your business need. You then use the drawings to guide your use of the tools so that after all your hard work you have not only something that it is beautiful and functional, but also meets your business need. The tools are not what is important. The important thing is to use the tools in a manner that meets your business need. To do that you have to have drawings to guide the use of your tools."

The above story seems far-fetched, but a recent study revealed that 70% of executives of companies who have implemented Lean Manufacturing are not happy with the results of their efforts. In many cases, this is because companies copy Toyota's tools without copying Toyota's management philosophy.

Elements of this parable:

Bill = a typical western-thinking manufacturer. He looks only at the superficial things that he sees about Tom's operation without deeply understanding how those things are used by Tom to meet Tom's business needs. As a result, he solves Tom's problem in Bill's business. Rarely is that ever successful.

Tom = Toyota, of course.

Jim = the typical consultant who is a tool peddler rather than someone who helps make the cultural change to a problem-solving organization

Tools = Lean tools such as 5S, TPM, Pull Systems, Kanban, Visual Management, etc.

Drawings = Hoshin Kanri, the "roadmap" that Toyota uses to ensure closure of gaps so that business needs and objectives are met.

Victorian-style china cabinet = Toyota's problem

Craftsman-style bookcase = Your company's problem

Don't be Bill!

Page 2/2