

BREAKTHROUGH

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

TRUE NORTH HORIZON

By Aaron Styles

OUR LINE OF SIGHT

I'm in St. Louis today, and there is a reason why I can't see the Statue of Liberty from the top of the Gateway Arch. As it turns out, the earth is spherical in shape and due to the curvature of the earth our line of sight is limited to only a few miles – at best. Even from an airplane we can see very little of the earth. When I fly home tomorrow and the jet is approaching Greenville, SC, I will not even be able to see Asheville, NC, only about 60 miles away. Of course, this is a surprise to no one reading this article. When we discuss this concept in manufacturing many find True North statements to be surprising and daunting. "True North" is a position from which it is impossible to improve. Some example True North statements are:

- 100% Value-added time
- Zero opportunities for defects (100% of potential failure modes error-proofed)
- Zero risks for injury

We are surprised when we can't see True North from where we are currently. I'd venture to say that few reading this article have ever seen the North Pole and that fewer still have ever seen the above True North conditions in a factory. This introduces two possible pitfalls that we at LMSPI see often. The first pitfall is to reject True North as unattainable. The root cause of this pitfall is the failure to understand that True North is not a destination, but a *compass heading*. The purpose of True North statements is to ensure that, as we solve problems and make improvements, our countermeasures remain "directionally correct" (aligned in the direction of True North). In a future newsletter we can talk more about this pitfall. For the time being let's focus on the second pitfall – being too aggressive in defining the "Next Step" toward True North.

The "Next Step" is our short-term goal in our journey to True North. We have to achieve "line of sight" to that next step. We have to be able to identify the work that will be required to achieve it and we have to be able to identify what it looks like. It shouldn't be abstract or leave too much to the imagination. The "Next Step" helps us in a number of ways. Of course it moves us further in the direction of True North. This addresses a business need and results in increased revenue, decreased cost, improved quality, or reduced lead-time. Possibly even more important is that in taking the "Next Step" we learn. We better understand True North. We tried some things that worked and that we will use again. We tried some other things that didn't work and we now know to never try again. These lessons are priceless. The goal of the Next Step is to cycle us through the Plan-Try-Reflect-Standardize (PTRS) cycle as rapidly as possible. The psychology is that if we choose a target condition that is too challenging and will take too long to achieve (and that we really don't know how we are going to achieve) it will create frustration, confusion, and discouragement among the team. This is a key reason why Lean initiatives fizzle out and become last month's "flavor of the month". Instead, we want to rapidly define, then realize a Next Step - and keep doing this over and over...forever.

What is your True North? What is your Next Step? When someone decides to climb Mt. Everest, they hire a Sherpa as a guide to help them. The Sherpa is from the area, has been up the mountain before, and knows the pitfalls and the safe paths. Who is your Sherpa? The practitioners of LMSPI are seasoned manufacturing veterans with profound knowledge. It would be our pleasure to guide you on your Lean journey toward True North. Let's take that Next Step together! [Contact us](#) to learn how you can schedule LMSPI for a no-cost meeting to explore how we can help you achieve your goals.