

lean leadership from the shop floor supervisor

the importance of the supervisor in the implementation & execution of lean flow

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If there is a key person in the execution of Lean Flow it has to be the shop floor supervisor. The CEO runs the business, makes key financial decisions, meets, with the board of directors, stock holders and customers. These are all important functions, all critical to the success of the business, all requiring a great deal of knowledge, vision, insight and experience. But the CEO does not reach down every day for 8-12 hours and touch the product, the people making the product, the customer, the suppliers, and every aspect of the processes to build the product. Not even a plant manager can influence the outcome of the daily operations as often and as much as the supervisor.

Yet the supervisor is probably one of the lower paid positions with less organizational power than many positions on the organizational chart. Any plant manager or business site manager will tell you an excellent supervisor

is worth their weight in gold. That is why sometimes really good supervisors have a difficult time moving up in the organization, because they are so critical to making the daily operation of the business perform. The site manager can't let them move out of their jobs.

If you want to change the business using Lean Flow you had better have the shop floor supervisor committed to the Lean Flow process, the changes that need to be made and willing and able to break down the barriers to success. And there will be barriers. From the people he supervises, to the needs/wishes of the customers, to suppliers, to the management team above him, to the processes he must deal with. A supervisor going through a Lean Flow implementation often feels like he is being resisted and taking grief from every direction. And he/she is. For the supervisor to be successful it will require a lot

of support, training, support, communication, support, resources, yes and more.....support. We need to arm the supervisor with the knowledge of how the Lean Flow processes should work direction on how to make it work, then enough support to ensure it will work. The supervisor everyday will make countless small decisions whether or not to implement Lean Flow as it was designed.

The supervisor can ensure that the manufacturing processes now aligned in a flow will either be run as designed or allow products to batch and queue.

The supervisor will coach the workforce to move to the work when the Lean Flow signals tell them to, or allow them to stay in one place and build work-in-process.

The supervisor makes sure that the material kanban that signal for replenishment from the suppliers are properly triggered or will allow the workforce to ignore, mishandle, or delay the signals risking material shortages.

The supervisor works with the workforce to identify potential improvements, and implements those ideas, or ignores input, or does not encourage input, or reacts negatively to input, therefore killing the continuous improvement initiative.

The supervisor will answer Lean Flow questions correctly and confidently when the workforce asks, or with no training will either not answer or answer incorrectly causing doubt and concern over Lean Flow changes.

All of these and many more are the issues that a supervisor could encounter as part of a Lean Flow implementation. To ensure the supervisor is successful, and therefore the Lean Flow implementation, there are few steps that can be taken.

Involve the supervisor from the beginning in the Lean Flow implementation. Choose on or more supervisors to be part of the Lean Flow implementation team. If the supervisor is not part of the factory design

process, it is a mistake. There will be no ownership in the Lean Flow design or execution of the design.

Education for all of the supervision in Lean Flow tools and principles is really important. The supervisor will answer more questions about Lean Flow than anyone from the Lean Flow implementation team. The supervisor needs to be armed with the knowledge to answer those questions.

If a group is going to visit a company that has already implemented Lean Flow it should include key supervisors. The supervisor can bring back to the workforce the changes, the enthusiasm and the improved performance witnessed at company visited. The supervisor can talk with the supervisors from the company that has implemented Lean Flow and better understand the potential issues he/she will face, what questions to be prepared to answer, and what problems to avoid.

The Lean Flow implementation team needs to provide the supervisor with the support needed to be confident that they will be successful. This should include support for issues that arise during all phases of the implementation. This is especially important during the execution phase, when the factory has been rearranged and the small issues that can make or break the

implementation are discovered. Resolving those issues to the satisfaction of the workforce and the supervisor are key to them taking ownership.

Praise for the results will automatically go to the implementation team. But if an implementation was successful it was because of the efforts of the supervisors and the workforce. Make sure that these people are properly recognized as well.

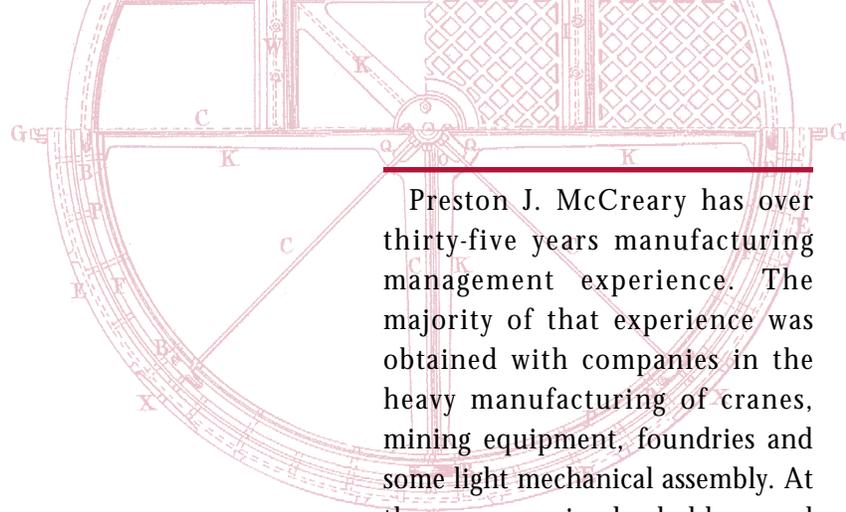
We perform against how we are measured. Make sure that the measurements used for evaluating a supervisor's performance are consistent with the Lean Flow goals. If we are judging a supervisor off of individual efficiency at a process, that will work against keeping inventory down between processes to reduce lead time. The metrics to measure the supervisor need to be consistent with

Improving on-time delivery performance

- ✓ *Reducing lead time*
- ✓ *Reducing inventory*
Meeting daily production outputs planned to the customer
- ✓ *Improving quality*
Improving productivity of the entire workforce vs. at a process level
- ✓ *Input from the workforce for continuous improvement.*

Use the supervisor and the workforce to introduce the improvements made to senior staff, corporate executives, customers, or the future implementation teams that want to visit the new Lean Flow facilities. Let them take greater ownership in the changes. Let them demonstrate the enthusiasm, pride, and dramatically improved results to the visitors looking to learn about Lean Flow from an experienced practitioner.

It is impossible to under estimate the impact on a Lean Flow implementation that a supervisor can have. Do not take for granted that the supervisor is supporting the Lean Flow implementation. Make sure, and make the Lean Flow implementation as successful as possible. 



Preston J. McCreary has over thirty-five years manufacturing management experience. The majority of that experience was obtained with companies in the heavy manufacturing of cranes, mining equipment, foundries and some light mechanical assembly. At these companies he held several positions including: Plant Manager, Manager of Manufacturing Operations, and Manufacturing Engineering Manager.

Mr. Mc Creary is a founding Partner at FlowVision, LLC. FlowVision, LLC is a full service provider of Lean and Flow manufacturing services. FlowVision helps businesses understand and customize the tools and methodologies of Lean Flow manufacturing to their specific environment to achieve significant financial results in manufacturing and office arenas. FlowVision's clients have enjoyed benefits such as dramatically reduced inventories, industry leading customer response times, improved cash flow, greater productivity and unparalleled quality levels. FlowVision helps their customers achieve these goals through hands on custom workshops, business assessments and on site support services. FlowVision is the recipient of Supplier of the Year award from North America's largest commercial laundry manufacturer as well as the leader in the high tech industry, Cisco Systems. Their 100% reference able network of clients is proof positive that not only is your vision possible, it is achievable.