

A **Leo Gillen** White Paper



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## **Leadership Pull versus Management Push**

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## **Introduction**

Continuous improvement is not a new concept. Over the years, only the terminology has changed. The success of a program is directly related to the *leadership* of the program, not how it's managed. Leadership provides the gravitational "pull" for continuous improvement, as opposed to a managerial "push". This "pull" is essential for attracting others to actively engage in continuous improvement.

## **Problem Statement**

Management often fails to sustain the necessary momentum of continuous improvement efforts. Typically, management views the change effort as an expense, subject to the next round of budget cuts, or as hoops to jump through. The goals of this process are merely seen as boxes to be checked off upon completion. Subsequently, management becomes frustrated after the initial push fades, and efforts fail to produce the magic numbers.

## **Previous Options**

A manager's approach to continuous improvement efforts normally follows a predictable pattern. The program is announced, followed by a spike in effort, only to revert back after a short period of time. Why? The program is a source of constant tension between effort and the company culture. In the beginning, when the greatest amount of energy is present, the efforts show progress. Over time, when the effort fails to attract others, the company culture is stronger. The effort to change relies on "pushing" others.

## **Solution**

Program leadership must be the focus, not program management. Leadership focuses on the "want to", as opposed to the "how to" objectives of management. Leaders own the program; they are not its victims. Leaders view the program as an investment, not an expense. Leaders view the program as a tool to help focus effort, instead of just shooting for a number. Followers join the effort because they want to; they are being pulled, just like a magnetic force.

### ***Benefit 1***

The owners drive the program and the gravity "pull" is stronger than the management "push" to maintain the effort to change. The "want" to constantly improve is stronger than the constant struggle to find the next new reward. The rewards are within each person and fuel the individual effort.

### ***Benefit 2***

The leadership gravity pull is like a magnet and will attract others. This approach engages the workforce and provides guidance for the spontaneous everyday decisions that keep the program moving forward.

### ***Benefit 3***

To quickly solve problems requires building teams rather than working in isolation. The team quickly collaborates to search for solutions rather than searching out scapegoats.

### **Implementation**

We must develop leaders who can build teams to collaborate, capable of searching for problems without fear of conflict. The workforce will only commit and be held accountable when the fear of conflict is gone. Enlisting others will fuel organizational change. The approach is based on individual learning and growth, not just training. Personal growth drives the “want” to improve performance. Improving the customer experience is the result of improving the systems and processes. Feedback keeps everyone engaged.

### **Summary**

Leadership is the secret ingredient to ensure success of a continuous improvement effort. Individual effort drives organizational change. Enlisting others with the gravity pull helps promote a shared goal. Operational dysfunction comes when the speed of change is faster than the ability of the company to adapt. Over time, systems and processes become useless because of the inconsistency. Avoid the predictable stages of a failed attempt at continuous improvement by developing the leadership pull. For a free initial discussion about this approach call (740) 947-2700.

Further reading:

The Leadership Challenge, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner

The Speed of Trust; The One Thing That Changes Everything by Steven M. R. Covey

Crucial Conversation; Tools for Talking with the Stakes are High by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler

The Balanced Scorecard; Translating Strategy into Action by Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton.

Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a team: by Patrick M. Lencioni