

**MID-IOWA BUSINESS**

# The Lean side of personal photography

Last month, we discussed how Lean philosophies played a significant role in Toyota overtaking the North American auto industry.

Lean focuses on continually striving to reduce the amount of time from customer order to product or service fulfillment by eliminating the waste in processes. Lean is the epitome of the old adage of working smarter. This results in products and services delivered quicker, at higher quality and at lower cost.

I would guess there was at least one cynical reader who questioned how that is possible, so let's take a look at another example: personal photography. Although it's been seven years since I had a roll of photographic film developed, as I recall, a sim-



**RICK BRIMEYER**

plified process flow (or "value stream" as it is referred to in Lean terminology) for a photograph used to look something like this:

- Snap photograph.
- Film waits for the entire roll to be completed and the next trip to the store.
- Deliver film to the store and fill out paperwork.
- Film waits for the next trip to the processing center.
- Transport film to the processing center.
- Process film.
- Photos wait for the next trip back to the store.
- Photos wait to be picked up.
- Pay for photos and take home.
- Enjoy the eight good photos and throw away the four bad ones.

A Lean approach starts with the customer to determine what they value enough in the service or product to pay for. In my example above, the only step I cared to pay for was the

processing of the film. This likely took only minutes to complete by the processing center.

All the other activities involved in the process are designated as waste. In my example, they added to the cost and extended the lead time from the snapping of the shutter until the enjoyment (or cursing) of the photo to days, weeks or even months.

I often had a roll of film developed and had no idea of what photos were on it because they had been taken so long ago.

The personal photography industry realized customers valued clear images delivered to them as soon as possible. For a vast majority of customers, what was not necessarily valued were "images on paper," at least not for all of their photos.

The advent of the digital camera allowed the personal photography value stream to be turned on its head. The new simplified process looks something like this:

- Snap photograph.
- Enjoy good photographs.
- Delete and retake unacceptable photographs.
- Print photographs (if desired).

That's it. I can now enjoy the photo in seconds and share it with Aunt Irma in Balltown in minutes. Best of all, defects, as defined as a missed opportunity because of my poor photography skills, are reduced immensely because of the immediate feedback. I learned more about photography during the first month using my digital camera than I learned in more than 30 years with a film camera.

The Lean process is also easier on Mother Nature with the elimination of the nasty chemicals involved in film production and all those trips to the store to deliver film and pick up photos.

So that's how the elimination of waste allows a product or service to be delivered faster, at higher quality and at a lower cost. I want to emphasize that, although my personal photography analogy made use of technology in the form of the digital camera to eliminate waste, most Lean improvements are accomplished without any changes in technology.

Toyota became amazingly effective at understanding what auto customers valued, then scrutinizing every step in the design, manufacture and delivery of cars to remove waste. And that has changed the auto industry as radically as the digital camera has changed the personal photography industry.

**Rick Brimeyer** is the Iowa Division Manager for PDG, a business consulting firm located in Story City.

## Clean Company

**Your time is valuable—  
Let the experts at Clean Company help you! We offer personal concierge services to make your life easier!**




- Dry Cleaning • Dishes • Ironing
- Errands for home or office
- Organizing • Grocery Shopping
- Laundry • Pet Sitting
- Housecare/Sitting
- Waiting Service
- Gift Shopping & Wrapping



**All the extra things take time—  
let us do them for you!**  
We clean residential and offices,  
weekly and monthly services available.

**Insured & Bonded**  
**233.5282 or 231.2659**

**FREE ESTIMATES!**



**Hotel Memorial Union**  
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

**Open House** Thurs., April 2, 5-7pm

part of Business After Hours at University Book Store

public welcome • meet at Hotel MU table at UBS entrance

1-800-433-3449 • 515-296-6848 • [www.mu.iastate.edu](http://www.mu.iastate.edu)

## THE TRIBUNE

Call 232-2160  
to subscribe