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Podcast Transcription
Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



Building Positive and Engaging Business Improvement

Guest was David Shaked

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David Shaked of [Almond-Insight](#) discusses his book, [Strength-Based Lean Six Sigma: Building Positive and Engaging Business Improvement](#).

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Transcription of the Podcast

Joe Dager: Welcome everyone! This is Joe Dager, the host of the business901 podcast. With me, today is David Shaked of Almond Insight. He is a positive change leader for individuals, teams and organizations. He is a practitioner and teacher of several strength-based approaches to change (such as Appreciative Inquiry, Solution Focus coaching and Positive Deviance), as well as Lean and Six Sigma. In his new book 'Strength-Based Lean Six Sigma, he presents an innovative and unique approach that combines the leading approaches to business improvement with the latest developments from the world of organizational change. This blended approach helps build a much more positive, engaging and ultimately more sustainable culture of continuous improvement.

David, I'd like to welcome you and have been a big fan of yours since being introduced and our first podcast where I invited you back when you completed your book. Does it seem like yesterday or years ago?

David Shaked: Good morning to all and thank you for having me again. Yes, it's been a while since the last one, but I still remember it very vividly. So thank you for calling me

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back and for giving me the opportunity to talk about the book.

Joe: We should start out by defining what Strength-Based Lean Six Sigma is and give us a little introduction, per se.

David: Many people want to know what Lean and Six Sigma are. Some people know about strength-based change involving methodologies like Appreciative Inquiry, Positive Deviance and Solution Focus or Positive Psychology. Very few people know that you can actually effectively combine the two worlds. You can do process improvement using Lean and Six Sigma but infuse it with strength-based change and basically what it means is doing the exact same things you do in Lean and Six Sigma, but taking a different lens to it. The lens is the lens of what works, what is actually producing value, what is efficient, what is flowing and where good results are happening. The idea is to learn from that rather than to search for the problems that defect the waste and everything else that isn't well. The more we learn about what works, the more we know what works and, therefore, the more we know what we need to do more. If we start by the common path learning what the problems are, the defects, the waste, the bottlenecks, if we start to learn that way, we will only know what doesn't work. That doesn't actually give us any idea about what could work instead and so what ends up is we think about ideas from elsewhere not from our own situation. The Strength-Based Approach is actually a search for what works using the exact same approach as Lean and Six Sigma process being 5s, Kaizen Event and everything else that you would do, specifically looking for what works in the situation and finding ways to expand that.

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Joe: You just brought up something and everyone loves tools, and you do a great job describing a few like the Root Cause of Success, the Seven Signs of Values, Strength-Based A3s - putting a different look at all these Lean and Six Sigma tools and doing it from a positive approach.

David: Yes, absolutely. You can do all the tools, but what's important for me to start with is not at the tools level. It's more about the concept of what are we looking at and applying it at the whole system level, so the tools can be used in the same way you would use any tools in Lean and Six Sigma. Looking from the positive strength-based lens to it a wishbone or a root cause of success is used instead of a root cause of defects. At a higher level, you can use the approach to figure out, to create a shared vision or what Lean and Six Sigma for what quality and efficiency programs you want to have in the organization and use Appreciative Inquiry to get to that vision in a lot more engaging way. A way that will actually get people excited about the efficiency program. The Strength-Based Approach can be done at a tools level but it can also be done at the team level, the project level or even at the whole organization level.

Joe: What is really different about Strength-Based? Is it just a different spin on Lean and Six Sigma, I mean, what's at the core of it? What really makes it different?

David: Based on my experience over the past five years I've been using this particular approach after 15 years of using the Classic approach, I can see what the difference is, and the difference is really people get a lot more energetic, engaged and very-very creative when they take the problem-solving process from the Strength-Based Approach. The

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reason is if you talk about problems, if you analyze the problems over and over again, you actually degrade the energy that people have; people get overwhelmed by wastes and defects. If you actually start inquiring into what they do well, when they have performed at their best, what is the best performance of the process they are responsible for – you get a completely different response from them and a lot more interest and engagement. Actually any change we drive does require energy, does acquire engagement and the energy you get actually opens up creativity that you simply do not get from the classic approach.

Joe: How important is it to start out constructing the Strength-Based approach versus waffling between traditional approaches and strength-based?

David: It's a good question actually and what I would say is the more strength-based you are, the more, I think, faster the insights and the ideas come and the more creative they are. So ultimately, it is up to each and every practitioner to blend the approaches they use in the best way that works for them. I personally only use the Strength-Based Approach because I've seen that it works much better, and I'm basing it on my many year of experience of doing the Deficit Approach. Ultimately for every practitioner they would choose the blend that they want of the different ways of doing it but the Strength-Based Approach is basically coming from a completely different paradigm and we don't believe in one way of solving problems, but rather in creating many possibilities and by using the Strength-Based Approach you actually open up possibilities.

Joe: So it would be fair to say that we could use a SWOT analysis and also a SOAR analysis back to back.

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David: You could. And you know what happens – when you actually talk about SWOT analysis we all are supposed to talk about strength and opportunities, but eventually the vast majority of the conversation that happens is around the weaknesses and what that does is actually shifts energy completely because the more we talk about these flaws and weaknesses, the less we know what we could. But if we do SOAR upfront, we are not ignoring these threats and weaknesses; we are still considering them, but we are coming from a completely different direction; we are coming from the direction of what strength we have that we could use, what opportunities we have which are the reframed expression of the weaknesses and threats and also what resorts and aspirations we have, what resort do we want to achieve and what hopes and ask a question that we have and that conversation is a completely different conversation from the one we have in SWOT.

Joe: One of the things that you mentioned in the book is about starting an engagement and that your first question within the engagement is so important. Could you expand on how that frames the rest of the conversation?

David: For those who are unfamiliar with Appreciative inquiry what AI talks about is the very first question we ask influences the direction we take and therefore the results we will get. That's why I emphasized the very first question we asking as practitioners, as improvement practitioners. What I ask specifically is, normally a client or someone I work with will start telling me about the problem, about the situation that we are facing which is less than optimal. What I ask them the first question would actually determine where we go with the conversation, so it's very important to be conscious of that. Rather than ask

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them to tell me more about the problem and when does it occur and who's responsible and what are the root causes, everything else that I used to ask before, instead I actually ask questions like 'Tell me when is this situation not happening or not as severe as it is the way you are describing right now' or 'Tell me what would you like to have instead.' Questions like that actually lead us in a completely different and much more open-minded direction, and eventually they do address the problem but they address it from completely different direction. A direction that is, you get less of a sense of a threat or weakness, you are getting much more confidence because people can tell you when the problem doesn't happen. Normally they find that there are many situations when the problem doesn't happen, and they start learning from their own experience, their own system, their own organization what helps them, the problem not to occur. That knowledge is much more relevant than any knowledge you can bring from the outside world.

Joe: I have to say in the book you did such an excellent job with, at the end of each chapter of giving questions that made you not only think about the material in the chapter, but it made me look at how I could construct an engagement using what you just told me. Was that the purpose in creating them and what are some the other ways to use them?

David: Well, thank you, first of all, for the feedback, it's nice to hear it and my purpose with this question was actually to get people to think and create for themselves the Strength-Based Approach they want to take for Lean and Six Sigma. There is obviously the way that I practice it, and I practice it in many different ways, but eventually if I take the Strength-Based Approach to the other practitioners that would read the book, what I would like to hope and believe is that they know a lot already. The purpose of the question that

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I'm asking in each chapter is to help people uncover what they already know rather than what they don't know. So again, I'm applying the exact same approach to what people know and then introduce some of my examples to help them continue to build on what they already know and that's really the purpose of the questions.

Joe: I love the comparison tables in the book between the Strength-Based Approach and the traditional practice; it was extremely helpful.

David: Thank you. The comparison was taken from the contribution that was made by Jackie Kelm who's a very well-known author in the world of Appreciative Inquiry, and I built on it as well and it's also important for me to say that we sometimes present it, you know, one against the other, ultimately we often blend them to some extent and there is, it's not that the Deficit Approach or the Classic Approach to Lean Six Sigma is not useful, it is, but it's more about shifting as much as possible to the Strength-Based Approach which I personally believe and experience is better.

Joe: If I have a tendency to be Appreciative Inquiry guy with a little Lean Six Sigma background or if I'm a traditional Lean Six Sigma guy trying to move the Appreciative Inquiry, which is easier to do?

David: My own personal transition was from the Classic Lean Six Sigma to Appreciative Inquire and later on to the combination of them wasn't very easy I must admit and that's what drove me to write a book. I would say that there are some easier ways, for example, for those who practice Lean Six Sigma specifically, one easy way or relatively easier way to

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transition to this world would be to learn about solution-focused coaching which is one of the approaches I use, it's not necessarily AI, but it's very close in the line with it or even positive deviance. These two approaches are slightly easier for the Lean Six Sigma practitioners amongst us. Just to grasp our practicing and start working with AI would come next for many people, for those coming from the world of AI or any of the other Strength-Based approaches I wouldn't necessarily focus on Lean and Six Sigma because it tends to be very technical and full of terms and tools that they wouldn't necessarily know, but by reading the book that the Strength-Based Lean Six Sigma book they can actually start understanding the language better and find the ways to integrate what they already know with the people they work with who may know more about Lean and Six Sigma.

Joe: Lean and Six Sigma are full of metrics; can we throw them out of the window when we move to Strength-Based or are we still measuring stuff?

David: You are still measuring stuff and, actually, I believe that metrics being so key to any organization are a very good contribution that Lean and Six Sigma make to the world of Appreciative Inquiry. In AI traditionally, you don't see a lot of talk about measurement, but Lean Six Sigma can introduce you... provided again you use the Strength-Based lens or approach to it. When you talk about metrics, when you review you metrics, we tend to look at what's red, what is underperforming, what is less than the average etc. Actually, you can learn just as much if not more if you learn and put as much energy to the green indicators which we know we tend to ignore all together. How do we learn what's working well and making sure that we continue to do it and even building it and with the red indicators it's less about learning what doesn't work and why, it more about so how do we

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want it to be different, and it's all about creating a completely different conversation with those different questions.

Joe: Often these engagements in Lean and Six Sigma are driven by Kaizen Events and in the book you specify a way to create a Kaizen Event from the Strength-Based Approach. Could you just kind of open that up and talk about that a little bit, what's different between a typical Kaizen Event and a Strength-Based Kaizen Event because I thought that was a great part in the book.

David: Thank you. Strength-Based Kaizen Event does follow very much the structure you would follow in a Classic Kaizen Event. What I introduced in it is, first of all, I introduced an Appreciative Inquiry interview about the process we want to improve, so upfront people interviewed each other using Appreciative Inquiry questions on the best cases they had when they performed that process or when they've seen the outcomes of the process. The purpose of that is to start as I said the very first questions we ask are most important, so to start the conversation right away from a Strength Approach finding out what works really well with this process. We are told to do the Kaizen Events to focus on understanding the process as it is rather than as it should be nobody is turning us to do it as it is when it is not working. We can actually learn from the process as it is when it is working, and that's the biggest difference. Then you can take any of the tools that you would use and use them again from a Strength-Based Approach. Many times I do a value stream map and I would do it again from a Strength-Based point of view. Mapping the process as it is, as it is when it's working and understanding what's working, what is producing value. I use tools like the Seven Signs of Value because is I want people to generate value, to increase value; I need to teach them what gives value rather than what takes away the value.

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Joe: It's really hard. I mean I've been drilled so much in problem-solving and asking why and digging down to find root causes of problems and that mind shift isn't something you just step away from. You keep finding yourself falling back into it when you've been trained that way. What are some tips to keep me on the right path?

David: Actually, Joe, you explained the challenge of many people including myself. I've trained myself over time to specifically notice what is the story I'm hearing from a client or a person I'm working with and specifically look for what is still working, what is still possible, however, difficult the situation is. That is the very first thing I do, I actually think for myself in the story that I'm hearing, in the program description, in the waste situation or whatever the situation is, what is still working, and that's the very first thing I do for myself, I reflect as I listen what am I hearing that is working here rather than isn't working. How do I find out more about it and if I'm not hearing any of that working well then I start asking myself what am I not hearing at all? For example, if someone is telling me that the problem is happening, frequently then one thing I haven't heard is when that problem does not happen and why and what happens then. That is a matter of what requires really training yourself as a practitioner as an improvement practitioner, ultimately; we need to remember that we all want the same result – we all want a better future than the current state, it's just how we get and what questions we ask along the way. You are right; it takes us a long time training because we have been trained in our practice to ask a lot of deficit questions, and we believe that it's the objective way of looking at something; it's not an objective way necessarily, it's just one way of looking at

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the situation and what is important to say is that there is another way which I believe is better.

Joe: Why is this needed now do you believe? I mean what makes it practical and useful now?

David: As I said, I've practiced for many years Lean and Six Sigma in a classic way and they work, I don't want to say that they don't work, but in the long term they become very hard to maintain and very difficult challenging to expand beyond a particular project, division of a business or one department and that's the biggest thing I think you can get from Strength-Based Approach because you can engage larger systems with it and by doing that the positive way you are actually getting everyone excited about being Six Sigma rather than dreading the approach that they've heard about before, so it is a good time to do that, there is also a massive expansion in the practice of Lean and Six Sigma around the world specifically Lean, I can see a lot of more and more growing practice and even in the public sector which is really trying to do as much of it as possible. It would be fantastic if they actually started to do it from the Strength-Based Approach because I believe they'll get too much-much better result and will not, will keep people engaged and involved and wanting to contribute and that's really what matters here.

Joe: Where can I learn more, where can I get the book and how can someone contact you?

David: The book is available from any retailer like Amazon; you can find it in print or in

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the Kindle version if you like. It is coming out in the US at the end of November, 28th of November. It's already available all across Europe and in some other countries around the world. You can contact me via my email which is david@almond-insight.com, and I would be very happy to hear from the people who've read the book or interested in the topic and answer any question. There is also a LinkedIn group under the topic of Strength-Based Lean Six Sigma, and people are very welcome to join and get involved in the conversation. It is a growing community around the world, we have a few hundred people who are now very passionate practitioners and interested in the practice, and I hope to see many more.

Joe: I think it is one of the better groups on LinkedIn and of course holding to its origins, it is a very positive group. It's not one that everyone is trying to one up somebody else all the time. There is a very positive approach taken on that thread, so I compliment you for managing that well, David.

David: Thank you very much, but it is also the contribution that everyone – including yourself, Joe, you put some very interesting conversations in there, and it's nice to build on everyone's strength and that's what helps them to learn that we have and, by the way, some of the things that I put in the book I actually learned from the conversations we had in the LinkedIn group.

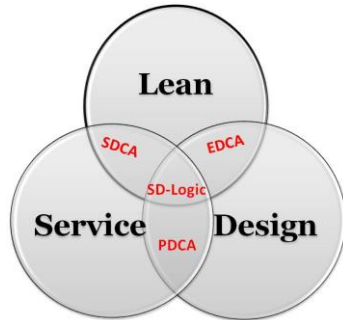
Joe: Well, I want to thank you very much. This podcast will be available on the Business901 blog site, and Business901 iTunes store, so thanks again, David.

David: Thank you very much, Joe, and thank you for having me today.

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Joe Dager is president of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

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