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Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



Positive Organizational Development Tools

Guest was Sara Lewis

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Transcription of Interview

Joe Dager: *Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 Podcast. With me today is Sarah Lewis. She is the Managing Director of Appreciating Change; a psychological change consultancy focused on helping leaders and managers achieve positive change in their organizations. She has written two excellent books, *Positive Psychology at work*, and my favorite, *Appreciative Inquiry for Change Management*. I have to say that my last podcast with Sarah is still one of my favorites, and I jumped at the chance to have her on again. Sarah, how have you been and welcome back.*

Sarah Lewis: Hi Joe. Lovely to speak again and I've been good.

Joe: *Well, you take the gambit of appreciative inquiry from personal coaching all the way through organizational change and what makes your organization able to do that?*

Sarah: It's not so much my organization, actually is the methodology itself. Appreciative inquiry is such a scalable methodology because it's about systems, and a system can be around one person. So, if I'm coaching, I'm interested in the person in that context and the

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system that they're thinking about and working with and engaged with. And then, obviously a team is a system and so is an organization. So, it's the methodology that allows me to have that great range and of course I have a network of associates and colleagues who if I need additional people for a larger piece of work I call them right in.

Joe: *One of the things that intrigues me on your website is the brief case studies you have on it. They all structured very similar; they include an invitation, the current state and then the outcome that was achieved. Is that an indicator on how you approach your work?*

Sarah: I think how you get invited into an organization, how the invitation is framed is very interesting. I mean it tells you a lot about the organization in itself and part of being, for anybody I think, being a more sophisticated consultant is not just accepting the invitation necessarily say at face value because that old cliché about what they think they want and what they might actually need or might be most useful isn't necessarily an immediate match.

There's an art of recognizing the invitation, engaging with the invitation, hearing the desire for change in the invitation and helping the organization to shape that into something that is possibly a little bit more open, a little bit more useful, allows for a more positive outcome that kind of thing. I'm always interested in and come in such alarming ways often. We can just start a situation, come in and do something, or I always love the kind of "We'd really like you to help us. We need to let you know we do eat consultants for breakfast." One is not to be put off by all of that. It's just an expression of their need and sometimes, their anxiety. And then, the evaluation, I think being able to, both for me and

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for the organization, being able to demonstrate progress from when we started to when we finish is very important. Sometimes, I can negotiate better evaluation processes than others. But, for myself I always want to know what's different for people and their processes and systems in their organization after we've done a piece of work to when we started.

Joe: *Do you find it difficult of getting that current state framed with the company because aren't they in there for you to do some action, to create something to happen? Are they willing to accept that time period of kind of educating you about the current state?*

Sarah: I see the two as happening kind of simultaneously. To take a typical example, if I'm working with a team, say it's a team of 8 people then I very much want to have an individual conversation with each of the people beforehand but that's not just information gathering. So, a certain amount of it is getting a sense of where things are at the moment, what sense people are making of what's happening, what accounts they are creating of possible and also how they got to where they are, the kind of what's wrong and who's to blame stories. So, I want to know where people's thinking is, how they make sense of the situation but I'm also working in an appreciative way. So, I'm asking them appreciative questions in those initial conversations and hopefully starting to gently challenge some of those stories and some of that sense-making and suggest that there are alternative ways of looking at things and I'm also probably co-creating with them ideas about what we could do when we're together. So, I'll talk about things I've done with other groups and how that's gone and what it sounds like that might be useful and I'm aiming to get them by the end of the conversation saying "That sounds interesting. I'd like to be part of that." That's

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how I get the sense of where we are at the moment, while also effectively starting the intervention because as you all know with appreciative inquiry as I sometimes say “there is no before”, you know, that moment you start engaging with the organization, you’re either reinforcing the way it already is by just accepting what it tells you or you’re starting to change things by asking questions that haven’t thought about before.

Joe: *I have to back up. The other day in the mail, I received your new Appreciating Cards. Thank you very much and what’s the proper name for them?*

Sarah: Positive Organizational Development Cards.

Joe: *What you just talked about there, is that how the cards are kind of framed, the conversation that you might have just as you’ve just discussed a little bit?*

Sarah: I tend to use them more with groups at the moment. So, as you know, in each of the cards the front page, the front side just gives you a sense of the concept that we’re thinking about, the thing that helps make a positive organization. So, just picking up a couple here, I’ve Feeling Connected, so in positive organizations people feel much more connected. Mindfulness, the very popular topic people, are very interested in and again in some of the more positive flourishing organizations is one of its characteristics that people are not just running on automatic pilot. They’re sort of thinking about what they’re doing and the impact on others. And so, on the front side there’re some words like with Mindfulness, we got the words Presence, Attending, Noticing, Relating and Decision Making because mindfulness is very important to effective decision making so that we don’t just

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keep making the same decisions as if the world hasn't changed. And then, on the reverse side, I've got a few questions to help people have a really good discussion. So, again, for the Mindfulness one, we've got 'Describe a recent experience of really being in the moment. What was happening?' So, we're asking people to identify when they are mindful and of course we might, you know, they might discover that actually they're always living in the past or the future or, in a worry stage about creating lists for something rather. And then, there's another question, 'What are the most important situations where you need to be very mindful?' It's quite generic so we could apply them to an individual or a team or an organization. You know when do you really need to be paying attention because something different might be happening here? Because, there may be changes going on that you haven't noticed that could be important. And then, of course, there's 'How does your organization encourage people to be mindful when working with customers, suppliers or other stakeholders?' which is part of that same question again about how do you help your people notice the little changes in the world, their social world that might be indicative of a need for the organization to adjust in some way. So, the questions are to help people explore the concept, to discover something about themselves and about their situation. You can also, of course, add in a question that's a kind of weighting scale so thinking about your organization at the moment, on a scale of 1 to 10, how mindful would you say it is, how attentive is it to what's going on, where would you like it to be, what makes that difference, what would it look like if it was a 9 rather than a 4, that kind of thing. And then, there're a few kind of suggestions of what organizations might want to do or individuals or teams to help increase the sort of quality and quantity of this facet, aspect or their organizational life.

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Joe: *Is this something that I can use internally or is this something that's better with a coach or someone in training?*

Sarah: I would like to think that they could be used by people internally as well as a coach or a consultant. I've tried to make them so that even if you're not overly familiar with the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Psychology, they're kind of self-explanatory enough that you can have a go at using them and have a good chance of stimulating an interesting and developmental conversation. Clearly, if you're a little bit more familiar with some of the ideas that would really help and, of course, they all come from the book so you can always, you know, have a look at the book and read up on them. But, some of them, another one would be Positive Emotions and there's quite a lot of talk about these days about happiness and well-being and the difference that it makes and the relationship between feeling good and being successful and so on. So, if somebody wanted to explore with their team or their colleagues, how can we help create a more positive environment in the workplace, both for the benefit of individuals themselves but also perhaps because it might help boost our productivity. And then, this would be a good place to start, you could do some questions for discussion and then some suggestions afterwards.

Joe: *Well, how else would you use the cards? HR use them or would you think a more, a middle management type person could use them in training? How would you like to see them used?*

Sarah: I think they can be used different ways. I mean particularly strategic discussions around culture because they are kind of how do we want our organization to be? What do

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we want to grow in our organization? Looking at these different things, these different ways of being, these different aspects of organizational life, which are the ones that are important to us? So, any strategic conversation they'll be very useful for. But, you can also use them for like the kind of icebreaker, what I mean actually was a colleague of mine was using it with the team that handled, worked with before and he spread the cards out and just sort of said basically "Have a look at these and just pick one that as we say, you know, speaks to you at the moment." And, they had a look at them and one woman, and then tell us why you picked your card, and one woman picked up the card, I think it was Feeling Connected, feeling part of a team, being in sync with others, aligned with other people, you know, feeling part of a bigger thing and it really stimulated a lot of insight and observation for her that she had recently moved into a new job where she was no longer feeling connected and how much she missed that and how her well-being at work and her morale and her productivity were all falling off because she was now working with data in a computer and not working with people which is what she'd done before, and she was very emotional apparently.

This was just in the first hour of the day so that must have been fun. I use them with a group at the end of the day. Again, look at these cards and which of these, given our work today, is most meaningful to you and would you like to do some takeaways? And, one of them picked up one of the cards. I think it was Virtuous Practices which is all about things like patience, helpfulness, gratitude, forgiveness, humility and hugging it to his chest, he said, "I want to put this in my pocket so that I can put it out and remind myself like a herb shelf, you know, remind myself what I've got and what I can pull off in the right moment, put it into the mix to help make things better when they're getting sticky." So, that was

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really nice.

Joe: *Well, you know, my first thought of it was being able to take it as you talk about culture and to be able to separate them out and say, "Oh, we're certainly not this. We certainly have authentic leadership. We certainly develop high-quality connections, and our social capital isn't very good at this company. We don't have that." And, kind of separate them out then kind of find out who you are as a company.*

Sarah: I think that's absolutely right and you can also do it in terms of what's most important to us or you can do it "What do we think are the success factors of our culture at the moment?" So, yeah, absolutely, for an organization to measure itself against these things.

Joe: *Yeah, I think it was quite intriguing, I played around with them a couple of different ways. It kind of determined who I was. I'm not going to tell you the results of that. You mentioned one of the outcomes. Tell me one of the outcomes you've achieved with the cards.*

Sarah: I use them as well when I'm doing more like training type workshops. So, I was in Australia recently, working with, in different settings actually with people not so much as a consultant producing change in the organization, more helping other consultants and coaches to develop their practice. Again, as I was trying to explain some of the concepts that perhaps are key to Appreciative Inquiry or Positive Psychology to mix things up a bit, some of the exercises were around like, for instance, taking the positive emotions again,

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kind of you start with a card and then see how many different positive emotions you can come up with. There're only 5 or 6 on the card, so how can we expand this, what do we have in our lexicon, in our language around our positive emotions in the workplace. And then, the questions on the back ask about when they appear and so on. So, discuss the questions and, you know, and some of the outcomes are that people realize the whole, through limited language we have in organizations where there're a lot of words like love and joy and other things that we don't often use at work and that led to an interesting discussion about love and the workplace. How compatible or incompatible are they and should we use other words in the workplace? And so, I don't know if you would call that an outcome exactly but it takes the conversation in different directions, I guess.

Joe: *I thought they were fairly stimulated on there. I've even tried to put one up on my desk each day since I received them just to give me something to look at during the day when I have a quiet moment or when I'm waiting for something and thinking, I could just kind of think about it.*

Sarah: That is very nice. I mean I'll be honest with you. I produced these cards, created them and produced them, because I felt very driven to do so and it was something about producing a short, easy, portable version of the book that people didn't have to necessarily understand and read on the background but could get the kind of key important things and they were the things that I'd learned about while writing the book that I thought were very important in terms of helping to create positive organizations. And then, it was a bit of a case of put it out there and see what people can do with them. So, it was that, you know, the Kevin Costner, build the field and create the field and they will come from the Field of

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Dreams sort of thing. You know, make the cards and people will find much more creative ways than I do to use them and you've just demonstrated that with the idea of using them as one a day 'Thought for the Day' sort of card. That's a brilliant idea. So, I'm really hoping that other people will all use them and then, you know, join my Positive at Work LinkedIn group and let us know how they're using them and what impact they're having. They've certainly been popular.

When I was in Australia, had a lot of interest in them and I sold all the packs I took over with me and have had some orders, you know, since from people who've been in the workshops and could see how they could take them and apply them in their own organizations. And, these were people who were internal to their organizations, quite a lot of them, and having to take the cards and apply them in their own organizations to stimulate conversations about things that just don't get spoken about at the moment for whatever reason.

Joe: *Are the cards available throughout the world or are they just available in the UK or through you?*

Sarah: At the moment, they're available through me. I am hoping to get them up on Amazon at some point or at least I'm exploring getting them up on Amazon. Let's put it that way. There's an opening for someone because there is not that a that I can find anywhere, not a collective kind of web shop that promotes themselves, these kind of tools, not that I've managed to find. So, there are various others with our products, are aids to organizational development. No obvious central place to put them or to buy them. So, the

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short answer is at the moment you buy them through me; you can buy them direct through the website. It's a different website address. It's www.acukltd.com. If you look under resources, there's a page for the cards, and you can order them directly through the website and then we will send them out to you. So, at the moment they do come from the UK but I'm hoping of course in due course there will be more international distribution and possibly translated versions as well.

Joe: *They came from your book, Positive Psychology, could you tell me a little bit of how, revisit how that book is doing and, you know, what's been some of the comments about it.*

Sarah: The book's doing very well. It continues to sell well. Wherever I go, and people have it, I always get very good feedback on it which is really nice. And, on Amazon, it has 5-star ratings. One of the more memorable comments was somebody saying, "It's jam-packed. It's just jam-packed with good stuff." By which I think they mean, I hope they mean it's a nice mix of good research, you know, I tried to bring together the research in the field that was relevant to Positive Psychology at Work and then also include lots of accounts of how people are using Positive Psychology at Work. So, both the research and the practical application and various people helped me out with many case studies of the work that they were doing and I included some of my own and some of those case studies you referred to from the website as they're explored in a bit more detail in the book, and I also tried to direct people to some of the supporting resources. So, where to find, for instance, strengths cards to support the work on strengths, some of the other books that I used that I think are really helpful in this work. So, that was that book and I'm working now on a follow-up book as it were or a companion book which is Positive Psychology and

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Change, where I hope to showcase as it were some of the interesting things that I found out that I couldn't get into the last book. I had a lot more about leadership and clearly obviously very much focused on the change aspect of organizational life.

Joe: *I think there's so much merit and of course your books are excellent and I want to ask you just a couple of questions about Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Psychology and I think it's we've grown up solving problems. Leaders solve problems, right. So, that shift in thinking, every time I try, say I try to use strength-based or positive psychology and put the good things, you know I understand I need to do that. When it really gets down to it, I still frame things in solving problems.*

Sarah: And, there's nothing wrong with framing things in solving problems and if doing that solves your problem then that's great. So, if I've got a problem of how to get from A to B from London to Leeds by a certain time, that's a logical problem. I have to find out what trains are running and how long it takes when you get organized and out of the house and all the rest of it, of what weather conditions are like, so how likely is the train going to arrive on time. That's all problem-solving which is absolutely right for that kind of problem. That's the way to do it. The challenge arises when organizations are trying to apply that type of problem-solving to a much more complex social challenge. So, when organizations want to apply logical problem solving to changing culture that's when they tend to run into trouble because culture, as we know, is about how people behave and how people behave is about how they understand the world which is about their mental maps. It's about their social relations and these things if you want to create change in those areas you have to come at it from the psychology of people which is about interest and motivation and

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connection and communication and vision and values and all those kinds of things rather than the logical persuasion element.

Joe: *Most decisions are still based on emotions, right? I mean that's what we...*

Sarah: Well, they are, they are. Absolutely, but a lot of the time we don't have to worry about that too much because the problem-solving is sufficiently unemotional. The problem we're trying to solve it doesn't set off a whole lot of emotions. But, if you're talking about changing people's workplace, changing who they work with, changing the identity of the organization then you're affecting things that people do get emotional about, their sense of competency, their sense of identity, their sense of being valued, their ability to succeed and quite often their friendship networks, their work friendship networks. So, you're in a much more emotional terrain and exactly as you say, you need to kind of acknowledge that and come at it somewhat differently. It's a classification problem as it were people were misclassified. A lot the change they wanted to achieve in the organization as being the same as a logic problem, and it's not, it's a people challenge.

Joe: *So, I really need to take a step back, you know, before proceeding and look at who's involved and what people there and really my best outcomes on how to get there isn't necessarily going to be, the speediest way may not be in solving issues, it may be in looking at our strengths at what we can foster or what we can promote in our strengths.*

Sarah: Yes, and the quickest way is to get hold of the idea that it's not about having the answers, it's about asking good questions over a group of people whom you want to

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change in some way. Everybody starts with a problem definition. It's just the way we're built. "Oh my problem is, this team doesn't work, or we need to change the culture or whatever it is." But, the next thing is thinking about how to do I, exactly as you say, work with this group of people in a way that allows them to change their behavior and if you can draw out the motivation by helping people shift their mental models of how the world works, their understanding then the work is being done for you. You know, too many leaders feel that they have to have all the answers to an emerging situation which is impossible and also that they have to inject all the energy in the system for change. Both of which are, you know, the fast track to, well, a very overworked person shall we say.

Whereas making that switch around and realizing I've got a great resource here, all these people who are going to be affected by this if I involve them early on by asking questions that will affect the way they think then we're going to move more slowly to begin with but faster later on. So, the challenge with change often is the easiest thing to do it looks like is to solve it yourself and then tell everybody else what's going to happen. That seems fast, and that seems easy. But, the downside is you didn't get into that whole conversation about selling the change to people and overcoming resistance. Whereas, if you start much more slowly and involved everybody in understanding as you do why things need to change, not by telling them but by drawing out their awareness so that they begin to fit, "Oh yeah, you know, I need to do something different. Things are changing. The world's moving on, etc." Then, they'll be a gathering momentum which you can then help shape and guide and so on to move the situation forward.

Joe: *Your cards are divided into 4 different classifications. Why is that and tell me a little*

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bit about them classifications?

Sarah: I thought it would be helpful to try to sort of, as you say, classify the cards a little bit to make it perhaps a bit more manageable if people just wanted to focus on one particular aspect and also to help give them a little bit more towards perhaps working with an individual, working with a team or working with an organization. So, if you're a leader or you're wanting to, let's say you're wanting to work with people on their kind of personal impact, how as an individual in an organization you have impact across the system, be one of those people who is highly influential for good without wearing yourself out. Then, these are the sort of things you need to be looking at. So, flow is one of them. So, we know that when people are in flow, they're likely to be using their strengths, be very productive, be very focused, very engaged. So, that's the kind of, something you might want to acknowledge, you might want to use with an individual when you're thinking about helping them feel engaged and motivated at work. When do they experience Flow?

In terms of influencing others, we've got positive energy network, networks, and high-quality connections. So, both of these are about how very impactful people, two things, one, they're able to use like micro-moments, so small moments of contact with others to create something, move something on, shift something slightly so they don't, no interaction is wasted. It's all generative. It all helps create something better. They just have the ability to recognize that even a 5-minute conversation can be life changing, from the very least can be impactful in the organization. And then, the positive energy network thing is about people who have that ability to create a good aura or a good mood amongst the group and they're very valuable, very valuable because people want to be around

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them. People like working with them. And, if you have a good positive energy person, they, people will be attracted to come and do maybe some work that isn't top of their list but it needs doing and not many people have got the skills but they want to do it because they want to be, if Joe was in the gang, then I was to be there because we have a good time on project's where Joe's part of the team. If he's on that project, then it moves up my list of things I'm interested in doing so that would be sort of, you know, how you might use the blue ones.

Whereas, the cultural strengths, the pink ones, are much more about how do we want to think, what do we want to develop within our organization on a cultural basis? They're based a lot on the work of Kim Cameron, from America, about what creates some of the most successful, well, what are some of the distinguishing features of some of the most successful and flourishing organizations. And so, they all must look at authentic leadership, obviously very key but also things like positive deviance which is ability of the organization to notice when the things are going exceptionally well and to learn from those experiences, as well as learning from when the experiences are when things are going exceptionally badly which obviously everyone pays attention to. But, not all organizations are so good at noticing when things are going particularly well in one department or division or under a particular leader and being interested in, well, what are they doing differently. Let's go and find out what's making it possible there because maybe the whole organization could benefit. Does that give you a bit of a flavor?

Joe: Yes. Yes, it does. I think it's interesting because I go back, like the Positive Deviance is, you know, really expanded on what's working.

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Sarah: Yes.

Joe: *It's so important especially to marketing, okay, and sales, right?*

Sarah: Absolutely, absolutely. And, I had a fascinating conversation, coaching conversation not very long ago with someone who was very frustrated because he was a new manager, to be fair, and he'd inherited a couple of staffs and he was very frustrated because one of his staff just wasn't doing the job the way he wanted it to be done and thought it should be done. You know, and how could he change her behavior, so we talked about that for a bit. And then I said, I asked a question, something like "Tell me when this person has most impressed you in the time that you've been working with them." So, that was a stop and think a moment and he came up with something she'd done very early on when he first started managing her. He'd gone on a sales call with her, and she got the sale, you know, whatever sale it was and he'd been very impressed. I said, "Great. How did she do that?" And, there was a long silence as he'd realized he's never thought about it. He never thought to ask how she achieved her successes because he was too busy noticing that she wasn't doing it the way he would have done it.

Joe: *And, I think that's so true because we seem to, instead of deriving what outcome or what target condition we want, we seem to concentrate on the way we want someone to do it.*

Sarah: Yeah, we see what we're looking for, and he was looking for her using a company

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methodology I think, and that can stop us seeing what's actually there and what's...

Joe: *How do you do that, Sarah? It's that you have a tendency to frame things in that positive way so many times in that strength-based way to ask that question and is it just training and practice or how do I go about developing that skill better?*

Sarah: It's something about, and it is exactly that. It is skill and practice, and it's developing, some people, of course, have it naturally but most of us don't, it's developing the appreciative eye and the appreciative ear. So, somehow you're listening for and looking for 'where's the good here', 'what is working here', 'how did they do that', 'what resources are present in this situation that aren't being recognized', it's just something about listening for the cues and the other thing I guess is the key thing is the kind of which was what I used there, which is a bit of a flip. So, yeah, that's what you don't want, what is it you do want. So, if you don't want to do that, you obviously, so I'm doing some of this in my head I guess, you obviously don't want her behaving like that. You want her behaving successfully. Let's see what we've got to work with. So, that's the question about, you know, 'when has she most impressed you'. It's the opposite to what we're talking about which being deeply unimpressed. So, somehow just exploring, yeah, the other end of the same dimension almost.

Joe: *Yeah, I find that interesting because it's something that I think is so innate with people, and I admire them so much when I and I do notice it. Well, I wish I would have framed it that way.*

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Sarah: There are, there are a lot of resources around them, in fact, one of the things I'm thinking of doing my next set of cards. I've got two in mind. One is a set of positive emotion cards because I find it's a conversation not very well-developed in many of us. But, the other was a set of question cards just to, for exactly that reason really, to help people who are learning and working out how to frame things more appreciatively, more positively to move into different conversations. Just to give them those cue cards that they can have a hand or flip through before they go into a coaching session to sort of think about what might be a good question to ask or after a session thinking 'what am I going to ask next time' or whatever. But, that's not available yet. But, there are lots of books and things on the web as well that will give you generic type of appreciative and positive questions you could start picking up and not you personally, anyone could start picking up and working with to expand the vocabulary of question...

Joe: *Positive, positive questions, right?*

Sarah: Yes, exactly. Yes.

Joe: *And, that may be the next expansion pack for your cards, correct?*

Sarah: And, of course, there're lots of, there're 3 questions on each of the cards in here. There're 20 cards, so 3 times 20 is at least 60 questions in the pack.

Joe: *Something that I didn't ask that you would like to mention?*

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Sarah: As ever, Joe, thank you so much for a lovely conversation and I really hope people feel inspired to buy a pack of these cards and have a go in using them and see how they work and let us know, let us all know as we develop our expertise in promoting these positive organizational development conversations in organizations.

Joe: *What's the LinkedIn group called?*

Sarah: Positive Psychology at Work.

Joe: *Okay and what's the best way to contact you, Sarah?*

Sarah: SarahLewis@ and then it's the new website address acukltd.com (sarahlewis@acukltd.com).

Joe: *Well, I'd like to thank you very much, Sarah. This podcast will be available in the Business901 iTunes store and the Business901 blogsite. So, thank you very much, Sarah.*

Sarah: Well, thank you. It's been great.

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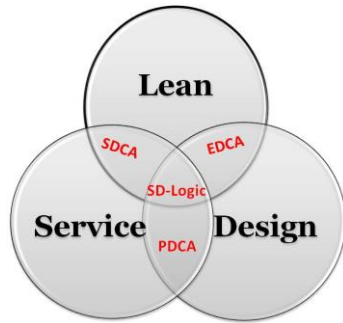
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Joe Dager is President of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies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

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