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Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



The Lean Thinker on Value Enhancement

Guest was Adam Zak, co-author of Simple Excellence



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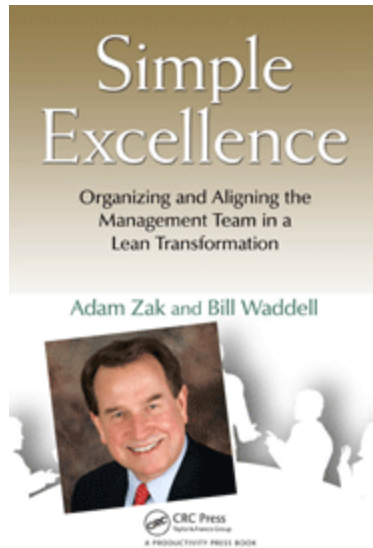
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Adam Zak is the founder and chief executive officer (CEO) of Adam Zak Executive Search and an accomplished senior executive with more than 25 years of experience spanning the areas of management consulting; financial and operations management; and talent acquisition. Adam excels at identifying and attracting business leaders who are experts in lean continuous improvement, process and operational excellence, and sustainability. His impact on organizations quickly becomes apparent as these talented individuals, in their new leadership roles, consistently go on to make their new companies excellent.

Adam has been using his uncommon expertise to help his clients improve their businesses operationally and financially for almost 20 years. He's been a partner with two international executive recruiting firms and now conducts executive searches in a much more creative, entrepreneurial, and results-driven (and lean) fashion. His unique and highly personalized methodology for recruiting exceptional talent is trademarked as PDCAsearchR. Adam is considered by many to be the most influential leader today in Lean recruiting and Lean executive search.

Adam has just co-authored a new book, [Simple Excellence: Organizing and Aligning the Management Team in a Lean Transformation](#).

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Joe Dager: Welcome, everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the "Business 901" podcast. With me today is Adam Zak, the founder and chief executive officer of Adam Zak Executive Search. Adam excels at identifying and attracting business leaders that are experts at Lean, continuous improvement, process and operational excellence, and sustainability. His impact on organizations quickly becomes apparent as these talented individuals, in their new leadership roles, consistently go on to make their new companies excellent. Adam, I would like to welcome you, and would you like to that introduction and tell me what Adam Zak is about?

Adam Zak: Joe, well thank you very much and a pleasure to be here this afternoon. Adam Zak is about a person who grew up around processes, problem solving, and basically getting things done, and I've channeled those sort of activities over most of my career in various functional roles, various professional roles. But at the end of the day, it's about making things better in your personal life as well as your professional life, and I think what we've seen in Lean and Six Sigma and operational excellence and process excellence all these in the last few years is evidence that this stuff works and we just need to spread the message more thoroughly, more deeply, and more accurately.

I manifest that by doing executive search work. I recruit individuals, typically at the director and VP level and above who bring those kinds of skill sets and talents to organizations who then use them to excel, and that's what I'm about.

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Joe: You just co-authored a book, "Simple Excellence", which I had the pleasure of finishing last night. What prompted you to write a book?

Adam: I've always wanted to write a book. I never really had a suitable topic until over the last couple of years. I've really become more and more involved in some of the strategic planning that my clients do when they bring in change agents, particularly Lean change agents in from the outside, and so I've been privy to some conversations and had the chance to watch some activities taking place, some moving along very well, some moving along not so well. Started taking a lot of notes and some of those notes became blog articles, blog postings, some became articles, and eventually there was enough material there for moving ahead with a book, enough to hopefully interest someone, based on the experiences that I'd seen. Bill Waddell and I have known each other for a while. We had a number of spirited conversations about what was working and what wasn't, and that really started gelling the various chapters.

The other thing I've seen a lot of is complexity in organizations, particularly as they get larger, broader, deeper, complexity, I think, becomes a waste, in and of itself. It's a breeding ground for waste, and could very well be the eighth waste that no one talks about. So, that's why the focus on doing things simply and building excellence by removing complexity from what you do in your day-to-day work of running a business.

Joe: In the book, you started talk about thinking differently, and the first chapter, I think, is talking about Mom and Pop theory of management, and it was, "Wait a minute. This guy works with these big companies, these large companies, and here he is talking about Mom and Pop theory of management." Why did you start out with that?

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Adam: Well, if you think about it, a good example might be a company like Anderson Windows, formerly known as Anderson Corporation. They have never lost sight of their roots. They truly believe in respecting people, much like they did from the very first day they opened their doors. They have built processes, they have built systems around people that support their work, that support their manufacturing effort, that support their customers and the value they are delivering to their customers. In spite of the fact that they are large, they still operate in a very, I'm going to call it, simple way, in the sense that they measure the right things, they don't measure things that don't make any sense, and they are very clear about the results that they want to accomplish and they communicate that very effectively.

So, if you think about it, guys with the name "Ford" on the door or Mr. Parker, who started Parker Hannifin many years ago, many of those same principles, if they endure, I think we need to throw back to those from time to time. Maybe a better way to say it would be, "Not lose sight of those principles that these founders of these companies originally had in mind when they started building their organizations."

Joe: The one thing that I took from the book is that it's still all about value, and more specifically, it's all about customer value, and I think that's really what you tried to get across in there, wasn't it?

Adam: I believe that's true. I think that value, we sometimes lose sight of what that means, particularly to the people that we want to have as our customers. If we rethink our businesses around what the customer wants and what the customer values, and then strive to build products and services that are in line with that, almost in the way that a

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well-oiled manufacturing operation flows products, you will be able to flow to the customer what it is that they come to you for, whether it's a new widget or some type of new service that you're providing. That's what you have to keep in mind. Seth Godin, I think, was recently quoted in an article that he wrote, saying that we shouldn't design customers for the products that we want to make rather we should design products for what the customers want. So, really putting the customer at the top of the pyramid is very, very important, I think, much as I think we see with companies today that are being successful.

Joe: I think that's what going on a lot with some of the innovation and Lean start-up and the agile-type things that's coming from software is including that customer early in innovation. They're trying to get them into that learning cycle, into their own learning cycle, to be able to learn from the customer's experience instead of the old way of building this product and kind of Henry Ford method, "What color do you want it?" "Black."

Adam: Well, you know, that's interesting that you bring that up, because we make a case of that example in the book, and that was Henry Ford's way of saying, "Look, the only way I can keep my costs down is to make a lot of stuff in black, and that way I make it affordable for a broader group of people. They'll be able to buy more of these things. If I've got to start changing colors, then it becomes more complex, and I'm not a sophisticated enough manufacturer yet to be able to do that and still keep my costs low." I've talked to a lot of people, like Google, recently about how they design websites and web pages, and it you go to the Google website, right, what do you see? A very plain-looking white screen with just a few icons and a very large search box, right smack-dab in the middle, because Google realizes that what its customer wants to do is very effectively search, so they don't

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put a lot of complexity onto that web page. Rather, they make it very easy for you to find what you want by typing your search parameters into that screen.

If you notice, a lot of websites, particularly some of our more well-known retail websites, they're very complex. It's very difficult, quite often, to find what you're looking for, to manipulate up and down the website. I think a lot of people could learn many things from how Google approaches what they do in web design, and there are many examples, in many other industries.

Joe: I think that they understand, as you mentioned there, what the customer values in using Google.

Adam: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Joe: I think that's one of the things that you come across in the book, is that not only do you address customer value, but you kept it outside the four walls. You attacked some of the methodologies that internalize the process. And challenged them to define that value from a customer's viewpoint, not internally?

Adam: That really is an issue that I think many, many companies struggle with despite the fact that we talk about removing the barriers to communication, removing the various silos that organizations have traditionally built around functional areas, whether it's accounting, or sales, or marketing, or design engineering, and product development, and manufacturing ... Yes, you have internal customers, but those internal customers, and again from the title of the book, have to be aligned in order to meet the needs of the

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end-user customer, that customer who ultimately is paying for it, providing him or her value which he or she then gives you some cash for, something that you can actually sustain and grow the business with.

I think we often look at what we're measuring, and we say we're measuring on the basis of internal metrics that may or may not be all that meaningful when it comes to actually focusing on the customer. The voice of the customer isn't really being heard, and we're often doing non-value added things because of that. We have to pay attention to these things.

Joe: You took on some of these processes, and said you'd need to build a value stream. It's all about flow through the value channels. But you really, to break it down, you truly believed in building a value stream per product market and then aligning your cost from your people and your processes to that value stream.

Adam: Yes, very much so. I believe in that wholeheartedly. When you do that, you are actually able to see what you're doing and what is contributing to success and what is maybe not so valuable. So, again it has to be something that you can see, and you won't be able to see it well unless you have those value streams enabled, and you can go back and check on them again and again. That's the kind of thing that you really need to be looking at and measuring.

Joe: Is there really people doing this, or is it just kind of what you and Bill thought that should be happening?

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Adam: No, people are doing it. Bob Barker at Parker Aerospace, who was kind enough to write an introduction for the book, is doing those things. And not just at Parker Aerospace, but in the broader Parker Hannifin organization. I think if you look at places like Amazon for instance, in the web services business, in their retail business, they are doing these kinds of things, even in their manufacturing subsidiaries. Is this perfect? Of course not, but the journey of improvement is a constant one and needs to be a consistent one. So, yes, there are definitely examples of companies that are doing that. Anderson Windows again is a good example. Barry-Wehmiller, Bob Chapman's company, they're doing these things. So, yes, there are real-world examples out there.

Joe: And you included them in the book?

Adam: Precisely, because of that. There is probably hundreds and hundreds of other companies that we don't know as well, that are doing those things also. But I think that focusing on the tools and the terminology and, some people get caught up in the Japanese language. One of the jokes is, "Do I have to learn Japanese in order to be able to do this?" The answer is, "Of course not." The reason Toyota used Japanese is because it's their language, obviously, but we see French companies. We see German companies. Porsche for instance, and BMW, are both doing these things, and they don't speak very much Japanese in those organizations. So, yes, it's not just in the US, but all over the world people are in fact getting these kinds of results. So, we're just trying to spread that message.

Joe: Well, you touched upon the sales and marketing. I always think sales ends up being a silo in itself. You have this big closer. You have this real energetic sales guy out there.

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How can sales not be a silo? I mean, he's got to be out there closing the sales for you, doesn't he?

Adam: Well, he does, but the question is not whether or not he's closing sales, the question is: Is he closing the right kind of sales, and is he doing so in such a way that doesn't really upset the apple cart when it comes to unbalancing your business? I think sales quotas particularly, when we have scenarios where people are trying to meet their quarterly or monthly or annual goals, right up to that very last point in time. They're trying to book sales and the company does not have the capacity, if you will, to support that sale, to support the product going out to the customer, getting it out on a timely basis at the right level of quality, and sometimes sales people get overzealous and offer discounts.

Discounts are great, but why do you need to offer a discount? What's different about your product offered on the 29th of the month vs. that same product being offered for sale on the first of the month? That's not logical. Why would you discount something, because it's being offered at the end of the month and you need to make a sales quota? Where is the business sense?

I think we need to communicate what is business sense, what makes good business practices, and then tie in the sales and marketing objectives in with the bigger picture. To draw a parallel example in purchasing or the inside of the supply chain, why would you want to buy thousands of units of inventory of something that may quickly go obsolete, when you only need to use a few hundred that month?

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The answer typically is, "Well, because I got a price break. I'm actually paying less than I would normally on a unit cost basis." But where is the business sense if that inventory is never going to be used, because it will go obsolete quickly?

Joe: Adam, when I sit there and look at it, and I look at a typical manufacturing environment. The supply chains order at a certain amount to get the freight cost down. Purchasing wants to order lot quantities to make the price breaks, and manufacturing wants to build them in batches to be able to be efficient and increase their efficiencies in what they're doing. When you get all those different components there together, and all of these things working like that, it's pretty difficult to harmonize all of them and get them all correct. Are we saying that we just need to flip that, and not look that way at these things anymore?

Adam: Yes. These various departments operating in that kind of a vacuum become silos, and what they're doing is they're responding to metrics and measurements to which they've classically been held accountable for many, many years. So, what we need to do is really stand that on its head. Someone, somewhere, and again, going to the idea of organizing and aligning how you do business, so that everyone is doing things that perhaps are not optimizing their individual function or silo, but in fact are optimizing what happens for the organization as a whole.

That really needs to be the objective, and how each individual, group, or department, or division, or function contributes to that. Perhaps sub-optimizing, perhaps paying a little bit more on a piece part basis, but allowing manufacturing to work with a higher quality raw

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material over time, which reduces not only inventory, but also subsequent repair and warranty costs, and potentially recalls.

Someone, some leader, some group of leaders, really needs to be sitting at the top of this thing and looking at the whole. That is what makes flow happen through organizations, that are in fact truly changing their culture and building responsiveness and voice of the customer into what they do and how they do it.

So, yes we do need to change our thinking about that. That's why one of the sections is titled "Thinking Differently," that's what we are trying to communicate.

Joe: When you look at an organization, you've seen a lot of them, where do you see change agents coming from? Are they coming from accounting? Are they coming from marketing? Who do you see waving the flag most of the time?

Adam: Well, a lot of times what we've seen is change, messages for change, or the clamor for change coming from the manufacturing, the production side. There are a couple of reasons for that. The biggest one of course is that that's one of the most visible areas where when you make a change you can see what's actually taking place, what's happening, and you can reflect on that. Again, going to the workplace and using the Japanese terminology, going to the "Gemba". That's always a big one, going to see for yourself what's happening. Not so easy to do with information technology or in the HR group or in the financial area. But to answer that question more and more specifically, we are seeing people coming from all parts of the organization. We've seen a number of financial and accounting managers and executives grab the bull by the horns and start

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looking for numbers that really tell you what's going on, as opposed to the numbers that are associated with generally accepted accounting principles.

You can't throw those out, particularly if you're a publicly traded company. Those numbers, that accounting system, has to stay. But to manage you really need to understand what the numbers are telling you, and you need to be getting better numbers and different numbers. So accounting is taking the forefront there.

In marketing maybe not so much but the people who are on the marketing side of product development and innovation working in conjunction with design engineering, we're seeing a lot of change proposals from that group. The feeling, of course, being that if you design the product more effectively with the end user in mind, you can often times build it more economically, you can build it more quickly, you can build in better quality levels. So it's coming from that side of the business as well.

Obviously from the executive suite, we're seeing a strong emphasis on that as well as senior leadership within organizations begins to truly understand and approach this on a holistic basis. A lot of folks have said, "We are examining and doing holistically." But I think when they start digging into the trenches they're finding that maybe it's not working as well as they'd planned. Bottom line is they're beginning to take notice, and things are changing. That's a very positive reflection on leaders' ability to think differently.

Joe: You really talked about value streams. One of the things in my mind is that the old product managers controlled the product and they knew what the customer wanted. But in a value stream manager, he seems a little bit more open minded. Is that a new position

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developing? Is a value stream manager an integral part of some of these Lean companies out there?

Adam: Yes it is. I would say that using the foundation of what a product manager... Let's go to, say, Kimberly-Clark or Clorox. That kind of individual, that kind of background and that kind of thinking serves, I believe is a good foundation for the function of a value stream manager. As we discuss in the book a value stream manager can come from engineering, can come from sales and marketing, can come from finance, IT, HR, doesn't really matter. The objective, though, is to truly understand everything you possibly can about the value stream family -- the family of products and their value stream, and then to be able to orchestrate. I think that's really the key. We're not talking about a command and control structure. To orchestrate and to influence what happens in that value stream, that is a skill that takes some time to develop.

The more successful the companies are, we see that they have highly successful value stream managers, people who truly understand what it is that makes that product family flow from their organization throughout the supply chain and to the customer. So yeah, it makes a big difference.

Joe: You talk a lot about flow in a process. Can we truly have end-to-end flow in a company? Meaning from customer to raw material? We have so many internal customers and we divorce ourselves from the marketplace. So I debate whether there's really true flow in a lot of organizations.

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Adam: My sense is that flow, however you define it, is probably something like the Holy Grail, and the search for that Holy Grail is something that will never be completed. I'm not sure that you can actually achieve perfect flow. I think the preconditions for that would be total transparency from one company to another in terms of its accounting systems and processes, in terms of all their manufacturing and design and engineering activities and processes. I'm not sure that in the real world that can ever be achieved. But to the degree that through our supply chain we can minimize as much as possible at every step of the way - minimize the disruption to flow, then we're building something and creating something that is to the next higher level: to the next higher level of quality, to the next level of lower cost, to the next level of customer satisfaction.

Will we ever be able to achieve total flow? Our business systems and models today around the globe are not set up to allow that to happen yet. But we're moving in that direction. That's really the definition of continuous improvement. It's something that's never ending.

When will you achieve perfection? I'm not sure. In the same way flow is something we need to strive for, the degree to which you are better than your competitor in achieving that, then you will be more successful than that other organization.

Joe: We talk a lot about manufacturing. Can these principles, and can the items you talk about in your book, "Simple Excellence," can they be applied to service industries?

Adam: Very much so. I've personally worked in the financial services industry. We didn't include any examples from the financial services industry in this book, because at the time we were writing it there was such a great turmoil within what was going on in the

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securities industry and the mortgage market and on Wall Street. Even the great examples that we had probably would not have carried as much credence, I suppose, and whatnot, just given the circumstances. But I've personally seen tremendous successes in organizations like Fidelity, for instance -- probably a very shining example. Various banks and other financial institutions have focused on backroom processes, on customer service processes. Call centers, if you look at an organization like Amazon or Zappos -- which Amazon recently acquired -- there are tremendous examples of doing exactly this kind of improvement activity and getting tremendous results.

The other thing -- and this could be a book. In fact, others have written books already about health care and the tremendous, tremendous improvements that we're seeing in patient safety, and the quality of care, and the speed with which patients are admitted, diagnosed, and treated all due to a variety of continuous improvement activities based on their vision of voice of the customer which is obviously the patient and the health care of that patient. So, yes, tremendous opportunities are there; particularly in health care, just beginning to scratch the surface, although some fine examples already available.

Joe: You address sales and marketing which, of course, I talk a lot about value streams in the things that I do. But can you really set up a value stream in a sales and marketing area?

Adam: I don't know of anyone who's effectively done that yet. There have been some stabs. I think what you can do is you can improve the processes by which sales and marketing happens. As far as setting up value streams, I think what you need to do is look at sales and marketing more broadly, and incorporate it into the larger value stream of

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how we connect a product or service to the customer. So, the value stream component called 'sales and marketing' is really very much a two-way communication device between the entity supplying the product or service and the customer who desires and purchases that product or service.

So, again it is not so much driving value stream concepts through sales and marketing, but what it is, is creating a communication network that takes you beyond the traditional creation of a sales forecast, and then an attempt on a regular basis to modify or update that forecast as real demand ebbs and flows. So, that's really a critical component, absolutely.

Joe: You touch upon a lot of key performance indicators in cost accounting things in the books of how applying numbers to it, but you do it from I would say a non-accounting sense. You do it on a much higher level. How important is it to get the right KPIs?

Adam: Well, I think first of all that I should mention that I am trained as a CPA. Now, I haven't practiced for many years, and I don't do my own tax returns, but at the end of the day numbers are important for a number of reasons. The key being is it is the language of the activity. It's a way of focusing on a result of your process, of your system, or whatever it happens to be. So, the numbers are important. Selecting what it is, selecting the right KPIs and then measuring properly, I believe is very critical.

Joe: If you can't measure something in a value stream or it is very difficult to measure...

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Adam: Maybe what you're getting at is just because something is difficult to measure, doesn't mean that you should ignore it. You should try to find a way to measure it if it is critical to your business. The key I believe is understanding what you need to measure. Sometimes, for convenience sake, we are measuring the things that are simple to measure at the risk of ignoring those things that we can't figure out how to measure, but would be much more valuable to understand. That's not an overnight solution. You need to focus on that. You need to try to either define metrics or create some methodologies to be able to understand what is happening.

Is that a concrete measurement? Maybe not, and maybe the numbers will be fuzzy, but your understanding, even if it is a little bit fuzzy, is much more important than getting an accurate number if that is a critical area for your business process or activity.

Joe: I think that is a good answer, Adam, one of the things that you quoted in the book is an Einstein saying, "Certain numbers you can count, and certain numbers that you can't count." Do you remember that quote?

Adam: I do. That quote, many people have adapted that same way of thinking to their own situations. There was supposedly John Wanamaker, the famous retailer, who said that at least half of his advertising expenditure is worthless, but he doesn't know which half, so he continues to spend the money. That's something very difficult to quantify. If you look at for instance web analytics recently -- and I think this is where a lot of these web companies got into trouble. They were measuring the number of times people clicked on websites. Well, what does that really tell you, other than that they're clicking on the

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website? Was there anyway of figuring out how much of that actually resulted in business or in follow-through requests for information, or whatever?

In the early days of Internet retailing, we were focused on things that were easy to measure, but were really worthless in terms of telling us whether that product or service was actually something that the customer wanted or was even satisfied with. So even when it is tough to measure, you've may have to focus on those things. You've got to clearly define; what are the important things that you need to look at.

Joe: One of the things we talk about a lot in all of this is customer input and customer value. Does that customer really want to be included that much in our business?

Adam: Some customers do not. I can cite examples of people who on behalf of their organizations will look at only one thing, and all they want to know about is, "What is the price, at this particular quantity?" Obviously, they have made up their mind that is the only thing that is important to them and that's what they are going to spend their time investigating. I think that is probably sort of a naive way of looking at things today. I would hope that more organizations are truly looking for value; more customers are looking for value in whatever it is that they are purchasing it, or some other way acquiring it.

I believe people want to be asked, and by people I mean individual consumers, and I also mean organizations that are buying business-to-business products and services. They would like to shape and mold a product or service to the way they want to use it, to the way that they want to employ it in their organization.

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I think that there is a competitive advantage in a vendor, in a supplier, taking an interest, showing an interest, and demonstrating to the customer that, "Yes, we will try to design the best possible product or service that fits your need in exactly the way that you want to use it." Yes, I believe there is value there.

Joe: One of my thoughts is the reason sales kind of stays as a silo, and stays out of all this, is that when they look at all these computers to prove their efforts, they have the whole organization looking at them as the data collection people, the people that need to give them the feedback from the customers. So, they end up spending so much time providing feedback or they perceive it that way that they spend little time in selling and making themselves money, because that is how they are structured.

Adam: It comes back to how we are 'structured' is the word you use. The words we use in the book are 'organized' and 'aligned.' If the incentives are, "The more I sell regardless of quality, regardless of customer need, the more I can push through that channel, the bigger my number at the end of the month, the end of the quarter." If I am successful individually based on those metrics, based on those reward systems, then obviously I am going to continue to do that. I think if you look at some of the more progressive organizations, and two come to mind in terms of how they do selling and marketing, Hewlett-Packard and IBM. It's not just a salesperson. It is a sales team. That team consists of an account manager. That team consists of product specialists. That team consists of design and engineering people, who are all focused on understanding on what that customer needs, how they are going to use that product, how it will enhance the value to that customer's business.

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They are no longer out there beating the bushes to make their monthly quota. What they are really doing is engaged in participative problem solving, and that's really what we're getting at here is that the selling and marketing organization needs to be part of a problem solving team, and most likely that primary customer interface, but not the sole customer interface.

Then that sort of structure now brings into question the traditional ways of compensation, the traditional ways of measuring success and failure. I think we are talking about a revolution in terms of how we are reorganizing, aligning and organizing, and again HP and IBM are at the forefront of that. So, others can learn from their success.

Joe: Are we just rearranging things? Are we going to benefit from this or are we just rearranging and adding costs to all these different feedback loops and everything?

Adam: Ideally what we're doing is actually reducing the complexity. If you look at the classic plan, do, check, act cycle of problem solving, I think if you apply that to the function of the value stream, what you're really doing is building in a series of checks and balances that will allow the process to proceed forward, if it's doing so effectively and stop and change if it's not. So, at the end of the day what you're removing is the waste of non-profitable and nonsense transactions, activities, whatever you want to call it. I think we're actually reducing the complexity. Now because we're doing this gradually, there's obviously going to be some overlap between the old ways and the new ways and there's going to be some transition time and transition costs.

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So change, because it is going to be slow typically rather than fast, unless you're in a crisis mode, there may be some initial goofiness. But that's why you've got to persist and that's why leadership from the senior management team has to be there so that we don't quit, so that we don't give up, so that we actually get to a point where we are now seeing the benefits through this improved flow and that's not going to happen overnight. So, yes, I understand what you're saying.

Joe: What did you hope someone would take out of your book?

Adam: My hope is that the reader of the book will take a look at this thing and begin to just question some of the basic assumptions that he or she may have had about his or her organization, their customers, their suppliers, the whole supply chain, value streams or not and how that individual himself or herself is actually participating in making what they do in a more effective, better way. The idea is, "Read this, ask some questions and see if it makes sense for us to be doing these kinds of things." It's really meant to stir up some ideas.

Joe: Oh, I think it goes farther than that. I think you're underselling it a little bit because I think you did a nice job in taking some complexities that are happening, especially in continuous improvement, and simplifying them and bringing them back to common sense. That was really my take on it. I enjoyed it because many times the best webinars and the best seminars and different presentations I go to, I walk out of them saying, "I knew that! I knew that!" But was I really practicing those things? That showed me that there was a connection with the audience and that's the one thing I want to mention about your book because that's what I took from it.

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Adam: Good! I think that in many instances there is a lot of common sense in the companies, certainly that Bill and I have talked about, have looked at and companies that I've worked with personally from a search perspective. But that common sense is sometimes hidden underneath this layer of complexity or jargon or maybe we've moved away from the way we know we should be doing things. But somebody read this management guru book or tried to implement that kind of the flavor-of-the-month program. One of the common complaints we hear is, "Oh, yeah. We tried Lean last year. You know, we've tried to do this Operational Excellence thing a few months ago and it's just not going well for us."

I think people get confused and I think if we bring back a little bit of this common sense, I mean, what are we really trying to accomplish here? Why are we, why are we? As a company, why are we here? Who are we trying to serve? If you start looking at it from that perspective and let that common sense prevail and then I think things will go a little bit easier.

Joe: I think clarity is always the number one issue in getting flow to happen to get anybody really to do anything, it's not that they don't want to, they just don't quite understand exactly what you want sometimes.

Adam: Well, again, that kind of environment is something that you see all too often. By the time the message, which starts out very clearly at some level in the organization, by the time that message goes through various channels and iterations, sometimes when it reaches the person who is supposed to really do something about it, it's really not there. Or it's faded or it's been mangled in some way. And if we could open up those

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communication lines, if we could make them more direct and if we could make them a little bit simpler and if we could provide those feedback loops, again, we're almost talking about a value stream, if you will, of communication and ideas, the people would be clearer.

They would respond and guess what? They'd be more engaged and enthusiastic and they could see how they were contributing to what that mission was. You sort of open up this, if you will, can of worms although it's a positive one in this sense. And all of a sudden people start to bloom and they start to really get what they're doing and why they're doing it and who they're doing it with. And that enthusiasm spreads. So it's a very positive message.

Joe: I think so. I think we all got wrapped up a little bit in the 90's with marketing, or not necessarily marketing, but mission statements and vision statements and those types of things. We forgot that customer value is really what it's all about. If we really understand what the customer values, it's amazing how that permeates through our organization in our decision making.

Adam: It really does. It makes a tremendous difference and the customers will give you that feedback. They will tell you that you're doing the right things and they like to be asked. So, it just makes sense to do it, absolutely.

Joe: When will Simple Excellence be out on the newsstands?

Adam: The book is scheduled for publication on November 19th. It's already available on some of the sites, typically Amazon and from the publisher, for pre-order. But we're just looking forward to the publication and we're going to be doing a little bit of a launch at

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some of the upcoming conferences, AME for instance and a few other places. So, just looking forward to seeing what it actually looks like. It would be nice to hold it, feel it, touch it and say, "Oh, yeah! Our book!"

Joe: You may already know this, talking to other authors and I know Bill, I think, has written several books before. But it's, the amazing thing that most authors tell me is the learning experience they gain from writing a book the year after, talking to people and the communication, it opens up.

Adam: I believe so. I've often described myself as a student of Lean and Continuous Improvement and many other things as well. But I really believe that Continuous Improvement makes sense. I think it's a philosophy that, for the most part, I think most people acknowledge that they're trying to do that. I mean, if you look at everything from the TV shows where people are trying to lose weight to people in marathons trying to go faster. We're all about getting a little bit better at everything that we do. The process of writing the book has put me in front of some folks, I was just amazed at the kinds of things that they were doing and learned already quite a bit from them.

I look forward to hearing about the experiences that others are having and hopefully if they're trying some of these things I'll get some very positive feedback. But even if they try it and it's not working, I'd like to hear about that too. I think that's valuable information as well. It's that feedback loop that counts.

Joe: I would like to thank you very much for your time, Adam. It's very much appreciated and I look forward to hearing how the book's going later on here.

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What others say: *In the past 20 years, Joe and I have collaborated on many difficult issues. Joe's ability to combine his expertise with "out of the box" thinking is unsurpassed. He has always delivered quickly, cost effectively and with ingenuity. A brilliant mind that is always a pleasure to work with." James R.*

Joe Dager is President of Business901, a progressive company providing direction in areas **such as Lean Marketing, Product Marketing, Product Launches and Re-Launches. As a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt**, Business901 provides and implements marketing, project and performance planning methodologies in small businesses. The simplicity of a single flexible model will create clarity for your staff and as a result better execution. My goal is to allow you spend your time on the **need versus the plan.**

An example of how we may work: Business901 could start with a consulting style utilizing an individual from your organization or a virtual assistance that is well versed in our principles. We have **capabilities to plug virtually any marketing function** into your process immediately. As proficiencies develop, Business901 moves into a coach's role supporting the process as needed. The goal of implementing a system is that the processes will become a habit and not an event.

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