Business901 *Podcast Transcription*

Implementing Lean Marketing Systems

Stop, Look, Listen

Guest was Terri Griffith

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Terri Griffith in her book [The Plugged-In Manager](#) describes an easy-to-understand framework for plugging in, explained through three core practices:

1. Stop-Look-Listen: What do your data say? What do you already know that will help you with this project?
2. Mixing: How do you balance your available resources?
3. Sharing: How can you achieve better results by integrating your choices with other team members?

About: [Terri Griffith,](#) Ph.D. helps people and organizations work with technology. As a Professor of Management at Santa Clara University (Silicon Valley), Terri helps mix together the technology of work (everything from tele-presence to the size and type of tools a crew would use to build a fence), the way we organize to do this work (virtual teams, collaborative leadership, hiring and pay plans), and the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the people we work with.

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Transcription of Podcast

Joe Dager: Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager the host of Buiness901 podcast. With me today is Terri Griffith. She is a professor at Santa Clara University Leavey School of Business and author of the newly published book "The Plugged-In Manager". Terri is more than a professor; she is a student on how we mix together the technology of work, the way we organize to do this work and the knowledge skills and the abilities of the people we work with. I would like to welcome Terri and with that said, is that what The Plugged-In Manager is all about?

Terri Griffith: The Plugged-In Manager is about how to make use of all the resources you have at your disposal. I think many of us tend to focus on the one thing we're good at. I try to present The Plugged-In Manager as a way to say, our world is made up of people, technology, tools and organizational practices, let's use all three. Then as you think about using all three, how do you put those together in some kind of systematic way.

Joe: I notice when I was preparing that you've been doing virtual distributed collaborations since 1984. Not to date you at all, but wow, can you maybe touch upon what was even going on in distributive collaboration back then.

Terri: Absolutely and, by the way, I was not the first. There were other people out there ahead of me. We've been thinking about these issues because teams want to find their

best members, and sometimes their best members just can't be inside those organizational walls. The ideas of telecommuting were being talked about in 1984. The big issue were how can I trust somebody whom I can't see. That actually pushed me to look at what we were calling than computer monitoring. Most managers were saying there is no way; I'm going to let you work outside my organization's wall if I can't see you in some way. That was not taken well; we had people, lobbyist, pushing for laws against it. Imagine that, pushing for laws against something in the collaboration space.

The issue is now; we're just sending out what we're doing, and we want people to know what we're doing. We know; they're going to then turnaround and help us get that task done in many cases. Back in 1984, it was a situation of trust and employees having to beg to be able to do this kind of work practice. Now, you've got the US government saying you have to have a telecommuting plan. We weren't so much looking at distributed teams; it was more about individual work being done outside the organization's walls. Now things have changed dramatically, and it's an exciting time for me.

Joe: What carried over from that time period? What has stayed with us?

Terri: The idea that we can work all the time, for better or for worse. If there is some kind of connection that we would have gotten when we were sitting in an office next door to the person if there is some kind of connection, we can make so that people still know what it is were doing. Such as when is it we are going to get a piece of a project done and how somebody else's piece is then going to fit in with that. So kind of maintaining that, who knows what, who needs what information and how we're going to coordinate once we have

all that together. Those things were absolutely necessary in the early 80's, and they're absolutely necessary now. The beautiful thing is the technology is catching up with our needs.

Joe: Well, I have to compliment you because you've packed a lot of information into a book and into what I would consider an easy read. This is meant as a compliment. There is a lot of information, but you can use it as an airplane book.

Terri: I think you can, and that was the goal, or the editing team's goal. We wanted to make sure that this book was accessible to everybody and the ideas in there are based on things that we've been studying and have good data, to support since the 50's. This information has been out there but it's been out there in ways that were not accessible, and that's always been kind of frustration for me. We know all these wonderful things, why aren't they getting used. I think it's because of the terms we were using and the way that it was being taught. The way that we were trying to teach it just wasn't singing to folks. My goal was certainly to find a way to talk about these ideas that we know are so important but in a way that people can easily both use and share with their team and then hopefully see it diffuse throughout the organization.

Joe: Who is the book meant for?

Terri: I'm going to say this, and you are going to say that's no focus. I wanted to make it valuable for individual contributors, team members, managers and then the executives. The third practice, there are three practices in The Plugged-In Manager, is sharing. My

justification for pushing that as an important practice is if I'm doing it that's good for me. If I'm doing it inside my team, that's probably helping my team in some way. If everybody understands why I'm doing things the way, then they're going to come along and help. They're not going to be questioning why we're doing it in this particular way So, we can be working together to find a good way to do the work we need. If you have it at the executive level, they're going to be thinking about what kind of resources can I give to my people. They're going to be good at the first practice which is stop, look, listen, and they're going to be good at the mixing piece which is a second practice and so sharing really amplifies the other two.

Joe: Is it like developing a best practice?

Terri: Best practices are getting a lot of bad press these days. So, I will stay away from that. It's a way of thinking; it's a discipline around how to approach these things. Would you mind if I go through the three practices in?

Joe: No, not at all.

Terri: That will give us a common background. The first practice of a Plugged-In Manager is to stop, look, and listen. Like a kid learning to cross the street, you don't want to get hit by a truck, and we've all been hit by trucks in organizations. Maybe, if we take a step back and we say, OK, just for a moment, I'm not going to say I have to have that great new shiny piece of technology. I don't have to follow what my colleagues did and implement this new practice or hire this one person or this one person is going to save me. That's not

the way to think about it. Let's stop and look and say, all right, my situation is this; the goals I need are that, my opportunities in terms of my people, my technology and my practices are these. I'm going to stop and look and look at those opportunities and then once I do make a choice that first step, now I'm going to listen and see how that's going.

It ties back in nicely to thinking about using evidence in your work, thinking about using data in your work but stop, look, listen is the first practice.

The second practice is this idea of mixing and saying; I've seen what my options are in terms of my people, my technology tools, and my organizational practice. Sometimes you want to use them in relatively equal power positions. Other times it may be people focused change we need or process focused change or the technology might be the lead, but I'm going to look to how to support that decision with the other two.

I tell my students; you can never change just one thing. Typically you don't want to change everything all at once, but you want to make small moves and listen for the outcome. Make sure those small moves cover those three dimensions at least in terms of how you've considered how they work together.

The third practice is this idea of sharing because as we share other people just come along and help or, find new ways for us to leverage our approach a little bit better. You get more help pushing that boulder up the hill.

Joe: I like the three different things. I look at is a learning cycle is what you're explaining

and how to distribute that learning to others. Is that a fair summation of it?

Terri: I would just add learning and action. I absolutely see that connection back to learning. Both formal and informal learning as we do our work inside an organization. At the same time is the focus on action. Given that I know these things, what is it that I'm actually going to do and how am I going to do it in a way that will increase its likelihood of success. Most organizational change implementations don't work. They don't work in the way that we hope they would. When we set out a business plan for how we're going to do something, and this is coming from lots of research, it's not because the idea was a bad idea. It's because we didn't implement it effectively and usually what that means is that somebody used the silver bullet strategy. All of us have bought that cool technology that was going to solve all my problems. We've been tracking this; I guess for at least 50 years; maybe it's going on 60 now. That doesn't work across, tons of different fields, we've seen that it doesn't work, and you need to take this more systematic approach that looks at the full system.

That system is the people, the technology and the process. If we just get people to stop long enough to do that and it can be something as easy as I'm putting together my meeting agenda, what do I need people to bring to this meeting? Who is coming? So that's people part. What I need them to bring and how we're going to be communicating in this thing. Is this going to be face to face which I think of as the technology? And to be face to face, am I going to be doing a presentation? How am I going to get the notes, taking and making them available to others? How am I going to do that? If you just sort of count off the three issues, I think we're going to find; we do a much better job and don't get

surprised as much.

Joe: Is it a how to book or a textbook type?

Terri: I think it's more a how to. I think the first part of the book explains these ideas, talks about why it's even more important today than it might have been a few years back. The next parts are the working part, and they say, well that's great but how am I going to do this? How am I going to mix these things together?

I tried to talk about it in a couple of different ways, we speak to different pieces of the audience, and you think about a great chef. A great chef doesn't just follow a cookbook. If you were a pure how to, it would look more like a cookbook, and it doesn't do that. Instead it says, here are your basic ingredients, here are your basic methods and techniques and now here is a tool to help you sort out your own situation and think about how to apply it for you.

It does have a checklist, and it does have a discussion about here is what you're going to do next. So, how to yes, but more a how to that expects you to become that good chef. Follow the cookbook, maybe the first time, do it exactly that way, but the next time start thinking about my settings are not exactly the same. The guests that I'm inviting to dinner aren't exactly like those guests. I'm going to make some adjustments here.

You don't want a book that's going to say, here is this completely new thing you have to learn how to do because that's hard to expect people to do in today's crazy environment.

Instead, I draw on the ideas of negotiation. Even if we're not a great negotiator, we at least understand the different steps. I talk about the mixing process, as being a negotiation amongst the stakeholders you're trying to draw in to your work and say, I need to know who my stakeholders are, and I need to know what the issues are on the table and are those issues going to be across the three dimensions of people, technology and process. What are the possible outcomes? It forces you to sort of sit back and do the stop, look, listen piece. Sit back and say, well, I'm probably doing it this way but what else could I be doing? So think about those different options underneath each issue and then let it roll out like a negotiation which again brings other people into the process and they're going to help you, more heads are better than one.

They're going to help you identify things that might be road blocks, people you need to be engaging, issues inside the organization or with your customers and clients that you need to bring into the mix. It seems like negotiation gets us well into the whole process of mixing. So if you've ever done a negotiation before or even watched one on TV, you've got the basic steps down.

Joe: With this process using the three key practices you kind of self-organize the teams, the principles around them and who you need within the team and then sharing outside the team. You describe a nice format for doing that.

Terri: I think that the team researchers are going to say this makes sense. I think the Lean crowd, the Agile crowd, I think, all those folks are going to see parallels to what they're trying to do in their specific environment, and I see that as great.

Joe: When I looked at the Plugged-In Manager, my first instincts were that it was another social media book telling me how to use each tool and how to use all this technology to make a better team. It's more than that, isn't it?

Terri: It is, and I admit it, I open with the Facebook example because, that's a huge question a lot of people have today. That is not the main focus. It's any kind of technology tool. Everything from what's the architecture inside a hospital cardiac care unit. The architecture can actually be the technology. When I talk about it, I talk about being able to build a fence and those different kinds of posthole diggers that you might have to make a choice about depending on how strong the team members are and what their skill sets are. I think about technology broadly, and social media just happens to be the latest big question on the table.

Joe: How do companies hinder this type of managerial aspect or Plugged-In Manager from functioning?

Terri: Well, the phrase I hear used a lot is they parachuted this new thing in. Imagine if, an executive goes off to a conference and they see an amazing presentation of a particular technology tool. They come back, and I'm thinking actually, I'm going back quite a way here when Lotus Notes first came out and presidents of companies, CEOs go to conferences, and they'll come back and they would say, "Wow, this thing is amazing. We're actually going to know who knows what and be able to find that information." Well, that's true if you've managed the people, the technology tool of Lotus Notes itself and the

organization's process.

What often happened is they install Lotus Notes. I have this vision, but I'm sure it wasn't true, but the vision I've always had was then they sat there, and they looked at it and waited for it to do something. That's just not how organizations work. So the organizations that did get that amazing value that was part of that sales proposition were the ones who said, "Wow, this Lotus Notes thing is very powerful. Here are some areas that I know we can get some great value out of it. I'm going to have to get some training. I'm going to have to make sure that I get people time in their day to participate with this, and I'm going to have to make sure that other people are aware that it exists. So they can go get that value from it."

Cases where the organization was thoughtful and practice Plugged-In Management even though it wasn't called that practiced it nonetheless. Those companies got huge value out of a Lotus Notes. The companies where senior executive comes in says go buy this now, install it and then it was kind of hands off after that. Those were very frustrated folks and used it as an e-bill system.

Joe: What does a company need to do to make a manager become Plugged-In?

Terri: Well, first of all they must read the book. I think reading the book; talking about the ideas and then trying it out on a particular issue and again if something is simple as how we're going to run this next meeting? A colleague of mine, Nilofer Merchant, who has a lovely book called "The New How", was just talking and writing on her blog about meetings

and the problems with meetings. I write about meetings in the book and I've blogged about the problems with meetings and certainly, we think about stand up meetings and things like that is being solutions to some meeting problems. So this idea, we can find solutions around something that we do all the time, meetings apply it there.

We already had a bad meeting probably the last week, so, if we have another bad one; it's not going to kill the company, but maybe we'll have a great one, and we'll have a great one just because we've worked with all three dimensions and we thought about it in that mix and negotiated a new organizational approach that got us some value.

Now I'm going to want to try it on something that's a little bit more important than just that one single meeting. I think making people aware of the approach is a great first step and then trying it out, taking that small first step and then listening. Because actually that first practice just stop, look, listen, listen to see how it worked and then make some adjustments and try it again on the next thing. If that's done in a kind of proactive and visible way which is back to the shared idea, the third practice of being plugged-in. If it's done in a public way than other people can say, "Oh, yeah, it kind of worked out well for them. Let me try it over here."

Just brings folks along. I don't see people sort of setting down and going, we're going to implement a plugged-in management, and I don't think that would actually be consistent with what we're talking about. But making people aware of the ideas and then giving them the opportunity to take the small steps and get feedback and let it diffuse as they see successes.

Joe: I think it coincides with Lean. Lean is a learn by doing approach. It's about find one problem and solve one problem. It is not about making this a revolution.

Terri: Exactly revolutions are hard to manage. We can just see around the world today. Exactly, when I talk about sharing, when I talk about how you put this in practice. I kind of push people away from a formal training approach. Some formal training is great. Get the ideas out on the table and provide people that scaffold to build upon. After that, I talk more about ideas of informal learning and letting people have the opportunity to try something and see if it works or see if it was a mistake and make those adjustments. I do think it's, exactly in line with Lean approaches.

Joe: Now, one of the things I hear about in training when we start talking about technology and social media and I always kind of smile when I see it, even Jack Welsh advised everybody to go get a kid to be a mentor. Can we get plugged-in by getting someone younger to show us how to get plugged-in?

Terri: That's a very interesting observation because this is one case where typically the less experience you have, the less likely you're to be plugged-in. You may get the technology piece right. You may have that skills set absolutely, and so if I'm the plugged-in person, I may say, well, I don't get this technology. I'm going to get that younger person who may know that technology better than I do.

That would be plugged-in on my part, but I haven't found that Gen Y or the like comes to

this naturally. I think it's just as hard for them as it is for us. Most of the plugged-in managers I've tracked down are people who have had pretty diverse jobs throughout their careers either formal jobs or cases where they had diverse experience, life experience in some way, and it's just harder for people with less experience to get there fast.

I do close the book with a fellow who is still in his 20s, and he has a diverse perspective, this is Tad Milbourn of Intuit. He has gotten a diverse perspective that he told me his life story at one point, and it was the way he thought about things, the way he thought about things as he was growing up. What he did as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin and then coming into Intuit. He was just prepped for what then Intuit provided him in terms of resources, the technology resources and the organizational resources. So he was ready for it and took full advantage, but he is kind of the rarity in the folks I talk to.

Instead, they've had multiple jobs, multiple approaches to their career and then at some point they went, "Oh, I guess what I'm doing each time when I'm successful is I'm worried about the people piece, I'm worried about the technology piece, and I'm worried about that organizational process component. How am I going to put these things together? Some time, it was in the middle of the giant project, and they said, "Wow if I don't get all these three dimensions working together, this thing isn't going to work but it took them, putting themselves in a lot of different situations to come to that realization.

That would be a great question. If I present these ideas in some kind of a basic way to folks with tons of experience vs. folks without so much experience. Who is going to get it first? I don't know the answer to that question.

Joe: One of the things you mentioned right there is about resources, and now we seem to have all the resources in the world, we just need to Google it. Why is it difficult for managers to use them all or maybe it's more the question is to choose which one to use?

Terri: As I think about the resources we have. We have access to facts and to a certain degree we have access to people with different kinds of expertise. I don't know that the manager themselves feel like they're living in a resource rich environment. I think they think they're constrained and what constraints and pressure due to the human thinking process it forces to focus. It takes this discipline to kind of break out of that desire to be pinpoint focused on a certain thing because then we don't think creatively, we don't think about the options, we don't think, we don't stop, look, listen, right that's first practice. People are under more pressure because maybe they're working with fewer people in the organization; they're more concerned about losing their own job.

They get in that constrained mode. Now the threat makes them more rigid. What we're saying here is, no you can't be rigid, every situation is different and so you want take the moment, give yourself that moment to see what your real situation is. I would say mostly and just right now; they feel themselves in a threat situation, and we've got to fight against being rigid and doing it the way we've always done it in the past.

Joe: But stop, look, listen is the focusing step isn't it?

Terri: Well, it's a focusing step that includes a broad look. So I'm going to stop, and I'm

going to force myself to look across those three dimensions and not just allow myself to dive in because, we know that's what people do. If we put in any kind of a stressful situation, they're going to do it; they've already done in the past. Most of us can do better, so I don't know that I want to do exactly what I did in the past. It maybe a safe answer, but it's not going to give me a great answer. So to stop, look, listen is that moment of reflection where you cast your view a little bit more broadly than you might have under any other kind of setting, give yourself that one moment and as I think about a meeting that could be five minutes.

It doesn't have to be, "Oh, we're going to do some giant review process. It's going to take us three weeks but, just take that one step, what else could I be doing besides what I've done in the past across those three dimensions because it forces yourself to think outside what might be your comfort zone if you're an IT person or you're a leadership expert or something like that. Think across those three dimensions. Figure out you don't have all the answers. You've got to bring somebody in and work those things together into some kind of a new way of doing things and see if it was actually better or not.

Joe: Can you summarize for me what a Plugged-In Manager is and why are they different?

Terri: A Plugged-In Manager is someone with the discipline to sit back before they make a move and look across three dimensions they're always going to think about the people, whom I have access to, what do they know, what are their motivations. Think about the technology tools they have or access to but they're also going to be thinking. OK, given the people I have, how much training might I need to use that particular tool? Are they ready

for that one or we going to have to do something else? How is this going to fit into the organizational practice piece? Is it going to be something that people are concerned about? Is it going to be something that has political issues? Is it going to flow easily in the practices we already have or is this going to require a shift in some of our organizational practices and how much trouble is that going to be and so, how am I going to set the dials? Plugged-in managers are always thinking about how might I adjust those dials across those three dimensions in a way that's going to make them just work together a little bit better.

They're looking for that support across the three dimensions, and they're thinking about how I am going to mix them together in some really nice way and then the most plugged-in managers are then also thinking aloud so other people can see them go through this process. They're engaging other folks; maybe again they're an expert in the technology side or the leadership side. So they're going in and getting their counterpart to help them out a little bit, and they're sharing this so that the whole organization can benefit in the long run. When I find a plugged-in manager, it's someone who in describing something they did, is going to hit on those three dimensions, and it's going to tell me about the decision process they went through to get into the solution that they found.

That's how I scan blogs; I scan books; I talk to people at conferences about, who do you know, who has shown this ability and can you give me an example of where it worked out either well for them or not so well or show me a failure and was that failure because they only were trying to manage with one of the three dimensions.

Joe: It sounds very close to that role in Lean of servant leadership that we were looking at how to manage your resources for my team to make it all work.

Terri: Completely agree. I think we're kind of doing a shared mind thing here.

Joe: Is there something you would like to add that maybe I didn't ask?

Terri: Take the first step stop, look, listen and then take that first step in an environment that's going to let you see how it works and let you see if you're getting something better than you got in the past, test it out and if it works, please let me know and if it doesn't work, let me know that too. I'm very interested in how people come to apply it given the way it's been described, and I'm absolutely always on the lookout for new positive examples and negative examples. So if you come across a Plugged-In Manager, please send me their name.

Joe: How can someone contact you or learn more about the book?

Terri: I keep a pretty active blog and website at Terrigriffith.com, T-E-R-R-I-G-R-I-F-F-I-T-H.com and happy to answer questions there.

Joe: I would like to thank you very much. This podcast will be available in the Business901 iTunes store and Business901 website. So thanks again Terri.
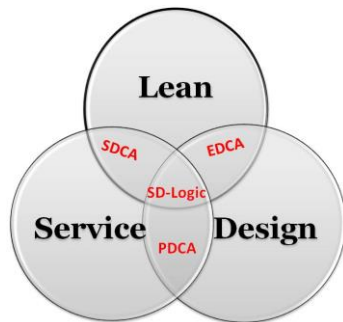
Terri: Thank you.

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