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Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



Unlock your Problem Solving Mind with A3

Guest was Dan Matthews,
author of *The A3 Workbook*



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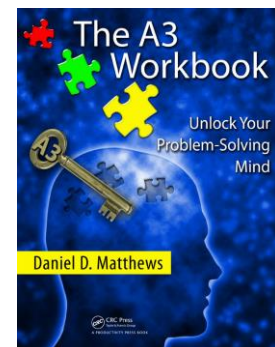
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Included in Daniel Matthews' 30-years as a trainer, are 14 years of supervisory and management experience with Toyota Motor Manufacturing and Toyota Industrial Equipment Manufacturing. Currently, Daniel works for the Kentucky Manufacturing Assistance Center (KMAC) where he works with manufacturers to implement Lean Manufacturing concepts. He is skilled as a trainer, coach and implementer of Lean Manufacturing, having trained hundreds of associates in the methods of the Toyota Production System (TPS).

During his time with Toyota, Daniel was part of the original group of trainers at the Georgetown Kentucky Toyota plant charged with developing an A3 curriculum that would be used to educate team members at all levels of the organization. While working for Toyota he became an experienced Training Within Industry (TWI) instructor.

Daniel has helped managers, leaders and associates build the skills they need to support a Lean culture including problem-solving, team building, facilitation, coaching, communication, conflict management and leadership both in the classroom and on the shop floor. Dan's skills as the A3 Problem Solving and TWI Master Trainer for KMAC have led to numerous speaking engagements. Daniel graduated summa cum laude from Indiana Wesleyan University with a degree in Business Administration where he was a two-time recipient of the "Outstanding Business Professional Award."



Dan is the author of [The A3 Workbook, Unlock your Problem-Solving Mind](#).

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Joe Dager: Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, your host of the Business 901 podcast. With me today is Daniel Matthews, a specialist in A3 and TWI. Daniel has a 30-year career with more than 14 years of supervisory and management experience with Toyota and is a skilled trainer and coach in implementing of Lean manufacturing. Daniel has just recently written a book called the "[A3 Workbook: Unlock Your Problem-Solving Mind](#)." Daniel, I'd like to have you finish that introduction and tell me about yourself. And maybe go into what prompted you to write a book?

Daniel Matthews: Well sure, Joe. Basically, I work for what's called the Kentucky Manufacturing Assistance Center. It's a not-for-profit organization, part of the NEP structure, which every state has. And we're charged with going to small to medium-sized manufacturers throughout the state of Kentucky and help them implement LEAN manufacturing. So that's basically what I do for a living. Aside from that though having worked for Toyota for many years, I was part of a small group of people who actually wrote the curriculum for A3 problem-solving that was used throughout Toyota.

Having read other books on A3 problem-solving, I decided that there was an area that was lacking, and that was the area where A3 is really driven down to the tactical level in the organization. What I'm talking about there is the management level and the supervisor, team leader, and operator level.

Most of the books out there talk about it more from a strategic level, and I wanted to make something that was easy to read and easy to understand, that people could really get in their hands and read through. As they went through the process of reading the book could actually apply it to their workplace so they could make some improvements and get some

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confidence in doing that activity.

Joe: My understanding of A3s is that that's really how Toyota teaches it. They kind of hand an A3 when you start your job and you go on a problem-solving journey on day one. Is there any truth to that?

Daniel: Not necessarily that they hand you an A3, but you're absolutely right in that they, from the very beginning, from the assimilation or orientation program, begin to talk about the importance of operators being involved in the continuous improvement process.

Joe: When you wrote your book, it is meant for someone that is doing an A3. It's not this big picture thing, it's like I'm going to sit it next to me and I'm going to complete an A3 and this is kind of my reference guide over here as I'm doing it.

Daniel: Exactly. It really doesn't matter what level of your organization you're in, you can use that book. Especially I wanted to drive it down to the operator level, because those folks are the ones who really can give you that cumulative effect in terms of your continuous improvement efforts. In my book I talk about the different levels of problem solving, or say Six Sigma, which is really for those more complicated and large problems that are sometimes difficult to get a handle on.

Whereas the majority of problems that an organization faces are those problems that can be relatively simple, or in some cases a bit complicated but can be dealt with at say the operator level in many cases, especially if they recognize the problem early enough before it becomes an issue that may be driven up to, say, a Six Sigma level.

Joe: When I look at an A3, why A3? There's a lot of different problem-solving techniques

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out there from the six thinking hats and more. We see a lot of them even just starting with word problems, when we are in school. But what's different about an A3?

Daniel: I guess, from my perspective, and this is something that I've actually been working on. It's something that I take managers through when I first introduce them to the A3 process. But as you said, there are many different types of problem-solving methods out there. From 8D to the problem solving that was created after World War II put in conjunction with TWI program.

I guess the reason I picked A3, one obviously is because I worked for Toyota and that's what I'm very familiar with. But the other thing is, is that those other problem-solving methods are typically, for the most part, from what I've seen are isolated to small areas.

What I mean by that is, 8D is a very good problem-solving method and it has a format that you follow to document that, but it's typically multiple pages. It also is typically for a corrective action process.

Whereas A3 can be used for quality circles, it can be used for individual problem-solving efforts by the operator. It can be used at a strategic level, to define the conditions of the organization and what direction the organization needs to go in.

The things like the problem-solving format for TWI, it really limits you in terms of the focus. It's really focused at that supervisor level and it's not really an organizational type problem-solving method. It really forces you to kind of use job methods, job instructions and job relations as your solutions to the problem.

So it, to me, limits your ability to be creative and come up with some really innovative

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ideas to improve situations.

Joe: You started an A3. Do you go, step by step by step? I mean, if you think of something, you stick a post-it note or something over on the other side? Are you really doing it on the 11x17 paper? Or are you up on a board doing an A3 typically?

Daniel: You know, it's kind of up to the individual. Obviously, A3 is kind of a freehand thing. Most of the ones that you'll see are done on a computer now, in terms of publications and that. But the A3 really is designed to be done initially by hand. Later on it can be done from a PC or something like that. But in the classes I teach, the operators physically take an 11x17 sheet of paper and begin to outline their problem using a pencil and that 11x17 sheet of paper. They can sometimes do it on the whiteboard. It depends on -- if it's a quality circle they might do it on a whiteboard, as a means of generating that process of identifying the problem initially. But eventually it makes its way to a single sheet of paper.

Joe: An A3 to me drives collaboration, because I get to certain points and I want input. I mean, it's not really meant for someone to complete, a manager to complete in A3, and do it, is it?

Daniel: No. Well, in the book I show the different levels of problem, when we pick up a problem from a specific level to a more vague level. And at the operator level you're going to be more specific. You're going to see the problem staring you in the face, so you may not need a lot of input from other people at that point. But the further up you go into the organization, in terms of whether it's management level or executive level, then yes, you're definitely going to have to have a lot of input from other folks and other

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departments, and even other value streams.

Joe: Can A3 really be that flexible, that it's good enough for an operator and good enough for the president of the company?

Daniel: Well yes, because it's a systematic approach to looking at problems. It's really based on the PDCA process that we all know. The PDCA process is very effective provided you use it right. The biggest pitfall that people fall into is that they want to automatically assume that they know the cause of the problem or what should be done about the problem. They rarely take the time to really completely identify the problem.

I think that's where I wanted my book to go, is I wanted to slow them down enough that they could really take the time to break that problem down, and define the characteristics that they were really trying to eliminate.

Joe: Most of us always look at the PDCA cycle; the planning should be 50% of the work that's involved. That's how an A3s laid out, correct, that half the page is in the planning stages?

Daniel: Actually more than half. The typical layout takes you from the theme, the problem situation target, cause, analysis and countermeasures. All that's considered part of the planning phase of the A3 process, then that really just leaves you two other blocks on the A3 that really talk about the do, check, and act.

Joe: Is there a flowchart you follow as you go through it? Do you create your own questions? Does the book go into maybe driving your questions or opening the questions up?

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Daniel: In the book there's a section in there, especially when you're talking about identifying the problem and creating that problem situation. There are several questions that it takes you through to begin that brainstorming process or thought process of what do I need to be looking at? How often is this happening, where is it happening? Is it only happening in this area or that area? There are several questions in there that prompt you to begin that process. Then as you go through it, you may find other questions that you might need to be asking.

Joe: When you're going through it, do you find yourself moving away from the original problem? That you're taken down a completely different path because the questions lead you there? Should you follow that path?

Daniel: You're absolutely right in that you can start out and -- that's again where I said people -- that's kind of the big pitfall. People assume they know what the problem is and what they need to do about it. Often what happens when they take that the approach is they miss the target altogether. By slowing down and actually finding out what the real problem is then beginning the process of analyzing the root cause and coming up with counter measures, then they're more successful.

If you're not taking the time to really sit down and figure, what really is an expectation or the norm in a particular situation? Then you can really get off track from the real problem. One instance just happened not too long ago in a class I was teaching for one of my customers. The person was an intern that was an ergonomic specialist. He had been hired to help them with ergonomics. He already knew what he wanted the A3 to be, so he began writing it that way. Then I tried to coach him not to do that.

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When it came time to actually make the presentation and through discussing with him and the class and asking certain questions, we found out that what he was trying to do was really just make the A3 fit what he wanted versus letting the facts of the situation lead him in the direction he needed to go.

Joe: Especially when you do it by yourself, I think you have a tendency just to create, just to document something, not really to do problem-solving.

Daniel: Right, again and the reason that happens is it's because -- I think in our nature that we sense or we feel that problem. We think we know what it's all about. Now we want to take action. We're the greatest people in the world to taking action. The problem is we're not always taking action on the right things.

Joe: My marketing background, that's what I really struggle with. The way I get judged is what creative idea I have to put more people in the marketing funnel.

Daniel: In that case though, what's the expectation, right? We always want more people in the funnel. The expectation is there. If you can define that more clearly, even breaking that down into what kind of people are we bringing into that funnel? Where are we really trying to go as an organization? Then we can focus our efforts on the right group of people instead of just cramming people into that pipeline.

Joe: In your book, I think you had a sample one on sales in there.

Daniel: Yeah, actually I did. Of course, it's been a while since I wrote the book and read through it. That was one of the situations that this particular group found itself in. They had some new sales folks. They really hadn't done a very good of defining the needs of

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those new sales folks. As a result of that, they were having some difficulty making the sales they needed.

Joe: I always look at defining the problem is a key thing in, especially in sales and marketing. I'm always taken aback; it's not applied that well in most Lean companies. Have you seen that to be true, that sales and marketing is kind of a silo away from the rest of the organization, let's say in a typical Lean manufacturer company?

Daniel: Actually, that seems to be the case in most of the places that I visit. I think in some industries and probably in some positions, there's kind of a sense that what they do is so different from what everybody else does. The things that we would do in Lean manufacturing wouldn't necessarily apply to that. The printing industry is one those areas. They have begun to embrace Lean. But, a lot of times when you talk to people in the printing industry, they tell you well, we're just so different. I don't think that's going to work.

There're other industries as well that are similar to that. They talk about well, we're so different that TWI can't possibly work for us. We're so different that A3 problem-solving is not going to work for us or Kanban is not going to work for us, or any Lean tool in particular.

Joe: When we talk about A3, it seems like it's come to the forefront in the last few years. But it's always been around, hasn't it?

Daniel: Actually when I was in the process of writing this book I contacted several people I knew from Toyota and asked them to do some research back in Japan with some of the

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folks that are back there. What I was really hoping for was maybe a copy of the original A3 or the very first A3 or something like that. It really, I guess, happened by accident in the late '70s, at least from the information I've received from the folks at Toyota.

Somebody had basically generated this format using the PDCA process. When presented it to his management or executives, they really liked the formatting and how simple it was in terms of communicating the problem efficiently. It's been around since probably the late '70s.

Joe: Did it start out as A2 or an A1, or did you just stuck at an A3?

Daniel: As far as history goes, I'm assuming that it's always been an A3. I can't imagine you being able to get the necessary information on a smaller sheet of paper. Again, an A3 is obviously a little bit larger than what we use here in the United States, but very comparable to the 11x17.

Joe: How do you get someone started with an A3? Do you just sit down? Tell me a little bit of the reaction and how you train them on A3.

Daniel: Training the A3 and doing the A3 is a little bit different. Basically, it's like any other classroom. We have PowerPoint slides and exercises and things like that. We take them through to familiarize them with the process. It's in a staggered approach where we talk about certain concepts and say problem identification. They actually go out and pick up a problem, define it, and bring it back to class. Then we have a conversation about it to help them understand. Work with it, they're on the right track or the wrong track. That's the training approach.

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But when that actually comes to working with an organization to develop an A3, it very much starts out as a quality circle environment, if you will. There are people from different aspects of the organization. We act as facilitators to talk them through the steps and the process.

Some of it's in a room where we're brainstorming and writing things on the board and flipchart papers. The biggest majority of it is them taking that information that we've generated and collecting data of the situation, analyzing the root cause and that sort of thing.

It's very much in terms of physically doing the A3 or working through a problem of A3 at the organization. It's one where there's a little bit of consulting, a little bit of direction. Then, you go out and do it. In some cases, you hold their hand through that process of gathering data to make sure they're getting the right kinds of stuff.

Joe: What's the hardest thing for people to overcome, what's one of the key things that they struggle with?

Daniel: I think the biggest thing is they just have to stop going forward and take a breath and begin to really collect data and let the facts lead you. I think in my book I talked about David Verble who was my mentor at Toyota, and that's what he would always say. You've got to let the facts lead you. And if you're not letting the facts lead you, if you're letting your assumptions or your opinions lead you through that process, then you're not going to be able to make the gains that you need to. You're not going to be able to make the improvements that you need to, because everything that you do is going to be based on subjectivity instead of fact.

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Joe: So are you saying not to follow my intuition?

Daniel: I'm saying your intuition, a gut feeling that I always talk about, gut feeling and how that can benefit you. You need your gut to tell you that there is a problem. But what you need are the facts to tell you exactly what that problem is. That's where people generally make a mistake, is they strictly go on gut. They don't take that time to analyze real data, to find out what's really going on.

Joe: What kind of mistakes did you make when you first started this, or even later on as an experienced person?

Daniel: Well, you know, and it's kind of embarrassing for me to say, but actually one organization I worked for, after working for Toyota. I was still younger and when, you're young you're kind of cocky, and I worked for Toyota so I knew everything. I'd been hired to do this one particular job, to develop training and develop the management and staff, to make them better managers and that sort of thing.

I decided that what we really needed was to improve -- based on my observations and conversations that I had with the people -- that we really needed to improve their problem-solving and communication abilities. I basically wrote up a plan and sent it out to all the managers in the organization saying, OK, here's what I'm going to do. I'll give you a couple of weeks. Provide me some feedback and let me know what you think.

Nobody sent anything back. I took that as a sign that everybody was on board with the program. I just went ahead and started scheduling rooms and classes and sent out enrollment sheets to everybody, said, hey, make sure you sign up for these classes.

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Well, day the class comes, nobody shows up. What I realized my biggest mistake was you may have a great idea and you may have a plan, but you really have to get that support developed early on in the process, for your plan that you want to implement. I really didn't take that time.

Once I came back and I sat with my manager and explained why I felt these things were important, then my manager was able to go to executives, talk with the executives, and explain why this was a need that the organization needed to support.

Once I did that, then everything went fine. But being young and cocky, I just kind of sidestepped that one little part of the process, which is really a critical part of the A3 process.

Joe: One of the problems that I always struggle with, and I think everybody struggles with, is we jump to why. We don't spend the time on the four Ws (what, where, when and who), which really breaks down the problem well. Everybody wants to get to why or solve the problem. Is there a way you've learned to be able to control that aspect, to kind of focus on that?

Daniel: The simplest thing is to really direct them back to the definition of the problem. That is the difference between the standard and the current situation. We start out by saying, what is the expectation in this particular situation? If that's your perception of the expectation, how can we confirm that that really is what should be happening in this situation? Then once we've defined that, we begin to look at the facts as they relate to that standard. Then see if there is any deviation.

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Then that's the part where you try to slow them down and get them to think about those three things, the standard, the current situation and the discrepancy. If you can get them to that point, then you've slowed them down enough. That they can start to think about the other things that you need, to really define the characteristics of the problem.

Joe: We define those characteristics; everybody always talks about going to Gemba, going to the place of their work. How do you do that in the service industry? How do you use the A3 in that way?

Daniel: Well, actually you can kind of go to the processes. There is a couple of things to do. One is you can create a current state map of your process so that you can gather information about it; see where your bottlenecks are. If you're talking about dealing with customers or clients and you've got your opinions about what the issues are, there's always the process of creating and developing a survey, and then sending that out to your clients to get some real data back from them on their opinions and feelings.

A lot of times that's what a lot of people do is they forget that process. They think they know what the customer wants, but they really haven't taken the time to understand the voice of the customer and one of the best ways to do that are through surveys. Whether it be over the phone, and if you can create a simple survey that people can probably do online or via an email very quickly, then you're typically able to get some useful information.

But those are the two things, value stream mapping that process so that you can find out where your bottlenecks are and where you have the issues in your process, and then finding out from the customer firsthand what their issues are.

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Joe: Is there another level to go to if the A3 isn't as concise that you need to be or...

Daniel: I don't know if there's ever a time when the A3, keep in mind that the A3 is a piece of paper that you format to tell the story of your problem. One of the things that I run into is that, I will kind of use TWI as an example. We go out to do TWI job instruction specifically, and you go into an organization and they have SOPs, or standard operating procedures, and their full of verbiage. When you do job instruction you're doing just the opposite, you're not really writing down every single thing that happens when you go through the process. You're really limiting yourself to the major steps, the key points, and the reasons. These are specific things that the operator really needs to know in order to understand the process and be successful in the process.

Likewise, A3 is the same thing, there may be a lot of information that you gather the actual surveys and things of that nature that you would go through and you would gather as you go through the A3 process.

What's going to make it onto the A3 is the essential information describing the characteristics of the problem, why the problem exists in terms of the root causes or causes, and what you really want to do about it, or what needs to be done about it to prevent that re-occurrence.

So there's not really many times that an A3 isn't really useful and even in six sigma you could pare down the actual information that you present into a single sheet of paper if you want. Although I know most six sigma report outs are multiple pages.

Joe: I've used an A3 and just use DMAIC process and summarize each section of it right

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there on an A3. It actually works out pretty clean because getting something on a single piece of paper really provides clarity.

Daniel: And if you're thinking about it this way, if you're a person in an organization who needs to get that buy in, or get that approval for purchasing this, or for making some certain change in a policy or procedure, if I give you a binder that's 50 pages of text that you've got to read through to understand why this needs to happen, the likelihood that you're going to get that support is nil. But if you can put it on an 11x17 sheet of paper and they can quickly at a glance tell you what it's about by reading the theme, and then quickly reading through each of the blocks on the A3, they understand your need, they can understand the logic. Because in there you explain the rationale, you explain the why this problem needs to be dealt with. What the important issues are, what the urgency is, and if nothing is done what's going to happen and that sort of thing.

All the way through the A3 we do that. We explain in our countermeasures cause why we recommend the countermeasures that we've selected. Because we take them through the process of evaluation that really gives us the answers to those questions. Those are the answers that management wants. They want to know why you think this problem is important. Or why do you think this countermeasure is the way to go?

Joe: I think people forget how important it is for someone to take a piece of paper and when they're all laid out the same, all through the company, that you can, at a glance, quickly recognize what's going on within the paper. Let's face it, we're a society that is dealing with sound bites now, so an A3 can really provide a lot of sound bites really quickly to somebody.

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Daniel: Oh yes, other people have said we're the microwave generation, we want information now. I'm one of the worst. If you hand me something that's multiple pages long or you send me an email and it's multiple pages or it's a long written thing, I'm probably not going to read it. If you send me something that is a few lines or is something visual that I can get my hands around real quickly, then I'll probably take the time to look at it. Other than that, I feel like I've got other things I need to be doing. I think most people are that way.

Joe: Knowing that when I look at the left side, that's the planning side. You're defining the problem in this section. The familiarity with the document adds so much within the company. I think that visual thing about an A3 is so important. You spend a lot of time on the problem-solving, that's what your workbook's about. But there's what, three other types of A3s?

Daniel: Correct. The reason I picked this type of A3 is just because this is the one where I wanted operators to really get a hold. The whole idea behind the book was really to take it down to that tactical level that we haven't seen before and to give organizations the ability to give those folks the tools they need to really be successful problem solvers and really help the organization achieve their goals. But there are other types of A3s. The actual A3 itself is a proposal until you actually begin implementing your countermeasures, so it really has a twofold purpose. One is, here's the problem, here's what's causing it, here's what I think we need to do about it. Do you agree, can I get your approval? So in that respect it's a proposal. It proposes that we do these things.

Once it's been signed off and you begin to implement your countermeasures, then it

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becomes an actual report. So this particular type of A3 really does take into account those two particular types: the actual proposal and the reporting out of the results from those countermeasures.

Joe: When you use project planning, you're just summarizing on an A3, your A3 could be a file cabinet full of documents behind it?

Daniel: Exactly. The great thing about the A3 is that it takes filing cabinet, if you will, - of information and puts it into a very easy to read document that can be looked at in five, ten minutes, and understand the problem and what needs to be done about it and whether you really need to take any action or not.

Joe: When we go through, one of the things that I think people struggle with sometimes when we talk about, something like the five whys, does it really take training to be competent at the five whys, to be good at it?

Daniel: When I talk about five whys, I don't think it's that difficult -- the concept -- to grasp. But typically what happens is that people don't understand that when we do five whys, not just our opinions about what's going on that lead to this chain of events that get to a root cause, it really has to be one based on gathering facts again. Early on I was telling you that David Verble said you've got to let the facts lead you. That doesn't matter whether you're in a problem situation block or the cause/analysis block. You really have to go out and investigate those potential causes to see what's really going on and use those facts to help you sort through all those possibilities to find out which one is your most likely and then come up with a way to test that most likely potential cause to see if it really is happening.

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There are exceptions when there are situations going on that you can't really do that with. Say for instance, if you've got an issue within an oven that you're using to cure paint, you may speculate about what's going on it that oven but obviously you can't go in the oven and look and see while it's operating, so you have to make some guesses about that.

Then you have to be able to test those guesses and the way you do that is through trial and error - based on that trial error you're going to judge whether or not your perception was right or wrong.

Joe: When we're talking about the five Ys, we're just not talking in this fishbone diagram with the lines behind it we're talking about some actual data that we're gathering behind it to take care of that one line answer.

Daniel: The whole idea behind the A3 Process is to prevent reoccurrence of the problem. The only way you can guarantee that is if you know the real root cause of the problem. The only way to know the real root cause is if you're basing your 5Y analysis on facts as you go along.

Joe: I think a lot of people, especially in the service industries, have a tendency to work off assumptions and intuition and they really don't take the time to gather the facts to prove root cause.

Daniel: There's the old saying, you've got to go slow to go fast. That's exactly what we're not used to doing, is we're always being told, we need to hurry up and get this done. I can hurry up and get this done and be wrong. It's like manufacturers, when you go in there and you start talking about lining manufacturing, you go through and you talk about the

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things they need to do and they say, we don't have time to do that.

We need to make products. Typically I ask them, I said, do you have a place where you do rework here? The answer is always yes. I said, so you have time to pay somebody to fix your mistakes, but you don't have time to do it right? That's typically the kind of thing that we find in problem solving, is that they feel like they have to go so fast because they're being pressured, that they don't have time to do the things they need to do like gather the facts.

Joe: I may have asked you this before but I want to ask you this because I've seen the TOC method, with the thinking process that they have, we touched upon it earlier, but any thinking process is good because it gets you to think!

Daniel: Yes, that's why I said, there's lots of problem solving methods out there, but when I think about problem solving methods that are the most effective, that's why gravitate towards the A3 Process, because it does encompass that wide range. When I think about problem solving, I think about it, say from a pyramid of triangle perspective - this is a visual I typically take management through - you've got the triangle and that's your company, at the very top of your triangle is your executives, the middle section of the triangle is your management and then that bottom level of the triangle is your supervisors, team leaders and operators.

Overlaying that is the strategic part of the process, which encompasses the executive level and the management level. Then you've got the tactical, which overlays the operator and team leader and supervisor and management level. So the management level really is strategic and tactical both.

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Then at the higher end of the pyramid, you've got the executive, which is strategic, then the lower portion of the pyramid, which is tactical, or the operators themselves. So when we think about problem solving, most problem solving don't have that variety of complexity, but as long as you have a process, a standardized process for looking at the facts -- and it's got to be fact based -- then I think you're going to be successful.

Joe: It does try to get the collaboration of everyone, which I think is that quality side that you build into it, when you have the other eyes looking at everything.

Daniel: You've got to have the fresh eyes, or people with varying viewpoints to ask you those tough questions that you might not be willing to ask or you didn't think about.

Joe: What did you leave out of the book? Is there something you've learned since you published the book that you wish you would have put in it?

Daniel: That's a tough question. I think every day I learn something where I say, you know, I wish I would have put this in the book or I wish I would have put that in the book. Overall, I'm pretty pleased with the outcome because I think it serves the purpose that I was really trying to get at, and that was that one text that somebody could pick up in their hand and read through, especially somebody who really doesn't have any experience with problem solving or Lean or any of that stuff. They could really pick it up and read through the book and work through the exercises and understand what they need to do to create their own A3.

I guess the proof of that in my mind is some of the people that I gave to read my book and to provide some feedback on. They knew nothing about Lean and yet by the time they

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were done with that they felt pretty good and could answer questions about it relatively easy about what they needed to do and how to do it.

I told you earlier about my father reading the book and how he didn't really have any clue about what was going on. And the only question that he had for me was that he didn't really understand that section in the book about "pair to".

I chuckled just as you did when I heard that and I really wasn't sure what he was talking about. Then when he spelled it I understood he meant the Pareto process. So that was the only thing that he really, as an outsider from Lean didn't understand.

So that's why on the CD I included a PowerPoint presentation of that Pareto process or to give you a more visual presentation versus just the text that's actually in the book.

Joe: On the CD you have some sample plans, you have the PowerPoint on it, you have some blank sheets people can print out?

Daniel: There's the sample A3's and there's also the case study answer A3s on the CD as well as the PowerPoint presentation I was just talking about. Then a blank format that people can use or the typical format that I use in my class that seems to work fairly well. Obviously in A3, you can draw the boxes to suit your needs. The form that's on there is just kind of a guideline.

Joe: The other thing that I looked at, it seemed like there was a way that you can use it to train, if you were a trainer. It was really a workbook. It wasn't this high level, just thought process, OK? It was a workbook to learn in A3, is what I took from it.

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Daniel: Exactly. That's what my goal was, was to create a workbook that could be used to teach from. In the classes that I teach, one of the things that participants get is a copy of that book. We actually use some of the exercises in the book to make various points and to get them to understand certain things about the process. When they walk away from there, not only do they have the experience in the class and the interaction from the other folks, but they've got that book as a reference material when they leave that really can kind of guide them through that process.

Joe: There's really not a vast amount of them or even a book that really concentrates on PDCA, I mean, that's named that. They all talk about it, but there's not necessarily some that really cover it in detail.

Daniel: I'm not really sure why other than I know that the A3 process or the A3 itself or the A3 format is a Toyota creation, obviously using PDCA and since it's part of their culture, I don't necessarily... And actually that's really what happened to me, to be quite honest with you. I understood A3 and I use A3 and it's just part of the way I do things. I never really thought about it in terms of, oh well, I should write a book about this. But one of the reasons I wrote the book was because one of my clients was moving from self-directed work teams to one more like Toyota has implemented or used.

The difference is, and I think what happens is, in the beginning people saw Toyota working in teams and they thought those teams were self-directed or took the meaning of self-directed to be that the teams get to decide on everything that goes on in their work area. That's really not the way it happens.

The team kind of decides what happens in the work area, but it's based on the objectives

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and goals of management. So this one client was moving from that type of scenario where they were trying to be more like Toyota and they had done a lot of things in terms of standardized work and TWI.

At one point one of their consultants, I talked to him a little bit about Toyota's A3 problem solving but he didn't really have a real grasp of it. My client went out and looked at the books that were available and read through those books. Since I was doing some TWI for them and he knew I'd worked for Toyota, he had asked me and said, "Dan, do you know anything about A3 problem solving?"

Just being a smart aleck I sent him an email back saying, "Oh, you're in luck! I happen to be one of the people that helped write the curriculum." Blah, blah, blah. So he wanted me to come down and kind of give him an overview of that process. I did it and in about 10 minutes worth of looking through, or me presenting the slides that I had in a quick fashion, he said he grasped more from those 10 minutes than he did reading all those other books.

So that's kind of why I took the challenge and tried to write a book that would be more workbook-related and that could be more hands-on for some of the things that are out there. Even though the books out there, I've got a copy of each and every one of them and they're great books, but this one kind of takes it to that next level.

Joe: I thought it was a different. It went in my three-ring binder section or my spiral section. I stuck it in there instead of putting it up with the hardcover books that you sit down and read in a leather chair. The three-ring binder ones are next to the desk where you pull them out and lay them out on your desk. If I have one complaint about your book is because it's not that type that I can lay it flat easily. I have to destroy the book, which

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I've been known to do.

Daniel: I'm glad that's the way it came across because that's exactly what I was looking for. My friend Jim, who actually helped me a lot by reading through the many evolutions of the text, he said, "You know, Dan." Because I asked him, I said, "Would you buy this book, Jim?" He said, "Yes." He says, "This is what I call a great airplane book." He said, "You could pick this up and you could read it through on your three-hour flight to California and have a pretty good understanding what A3 is all about."

Joe: You could probably get it done on a three-hour flight but then on the other hand, I think it's one that you're going to make notes on and you are going to make lines through it, you are going to dog-ear it, you are going to do those things, it's a hands-on book.

Daniel: Good! I'm glad, I'm really glad that that's kind of the way you see it because that's exactly what I was hoping for. It was something that was easily usable and you could put in somebody's hands and they could really kind of go back to it when they needed to.

Joe: Besides buying your book, how would you recommend to get started with A3?

Daniel: The biggest thing that you can do is just do it. You can't, I know it sounds terrible, but you can read all the books you want but until you actually physically go out there and apply the process and see where you end up, that's really where the learning takes place.

Joe: I can't agree with you more. If you do it, it's amazing how much better they get.

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Daniel: It really is all about practice. Because once you've written an A3 and you give it to somebody to read and then they start to ask you questions and you start to reflect back on what you did and why you did it, you say, I probably should have done this or I probably should have done that. I see it all the time in my class with the folks who, when we sit down at the end of the sessions and they're presenting out their reports to me and we start to talk and discuss everything. That's when I really see the light bulbs going on. If I just sat them through a class and they went through eight or 16 hours' worth of me talking up there and doing the exercises, they're still not going to get it until they really take something that mean something to them and they apply the process to it.

Joe: Well, I'd like to thank you very much. How can someone contact you or learn more about the book? I'm sure the book is on Amazon but what's the other ways?

Daniel: Well, actually probably the easiest way is my work email, which is dmatthews@kmac.org if they have any questions about A3 or anything like that, I'd be happy to answer them.

Joe: Well, I would like to thank you very much! This podcast will be available on the Business901 website and also Business901 iTunes stores. Thanks again.

Daniel: All right, thank you. Take care.

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Joseph T. Dager

Lean Six Sigma Black Belt

Ph: 260-438-0411 Fax: 260-818-2022

Email: jtdager@business901.com

Web/Blog: <http://www.business901.com>

Twitter: [@business901](https://twitter.com/business901)



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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.**

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