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Implementing Lean Marketing Systems

Is Problem-solving really the Core of Lean Implementation?

Guest was Tracey Richardson, President of
Teaching Lean Inc.

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Tracey Richardson, president of [Teaching Lean Inc.](#), has over 22 years of experience in Toyota methodologies including: Lean Problem-solving, Quality Circles, Lean Manufacturing tools, Standardized Work, Job Instruction Training, Toyota Production System, Toyota Way Values, Culture Development, Visualization (Workplace Management Systems), Continuous Improvement (Kaizen), Meeting Facilitation/Teamwork, and Manufacturing Simulations. Tracey is passionate about assisting Organizations or Companies who are on the "Lean journey" and wanting support implementing key elements for success.



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Prior to Teaching Lean Inc., Tracey was a Group Leader in the Plastics Department at Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky from 1988-1998. She was one of the first team members hired with the fortunate opportunity to learn from the Japanese trainers getting hands on experience from the experts. As a Group Leader her responsibilities were to oversee all team members in safety, quality, productivity, cost, and training and development goals for her groups. Throughout her ten years at Toyota Tracey took various training courses to improve her abilities in the Toyota Production System and Continuous Improvement. She accumulated over 460 hours of class time and priceless lessons from her trainers/mentors.

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Tracey's Website: <http://www.teachingleaninc.com>

Joe Dager: Thanks everyone for joining us. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business 901Podcast. Participating in the program today is Tracey Richardson. Tracey is the president of Teaching Lean Incorporated and has over 22 years of experience in Toyota methodologies, including lean problem-solving. Tracey, could you just give me a brief history about yourself?

Tracey Richardson: Yes, I'm from Toyota Motor Manufacturing; is my background. I started there in 1988. I was actually hired in as a team member in the plastics department. I quickly developed a passion for the systems and the methodologies. I was blessed with the opportunity to get to work with the Japanese trainers, and they were there by our sides, teaching us and mentoring us, along the way. Not only did I have the opportunity to do that, but I also had the opportunity to take several problem-solving courses, standardized work, and the Toyota systems methodologies.

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I spent three years as a team member on the production floor. And then I was promoted to team leader, which is first level line supervisor, and over several of the different lines that we had in instrument panel trim. I worked as a team leader for five years, and I went through various courses to be promoted, and some of the core education content that they require.

After five years, I was actually promoted to group leader, which is the first level management for Toyota. I was over 45 individuals, with five team leaders, and that took me up until about 1998. At that particular point in time, I decided to leave the company as a full-time employee, and I actually went back to the company as a consultant or instructor, contractor... a lot of different words for that.

I actually worked in the Human Resources training and development, and actually taught courses for Toyota at TMMK, which is the Kentucky plant in Georgetown, and also across some of the North American plants. So, I still teach there, on occasion, when there's a need for the courses in the Human Resources department, like problem-solving and some of the standardized work, and pre-promotion training classes.

I also teach outside of Toyota with various organizations that are interested in lean implementation, standardized work, the Toyota production system methodologies, and one of my favorite subjects, obviously, is the lean problem-solving. So, I spent a lot of time on the road, working with companies interested.

Joe: I always picture working with the Japanese that they never would give you a direct answer, they just would ask questions: the Socratic Method or whatever. Is that true?

Tracey: Yes, it is. I can't tell you how many times the trainer would look at you and say, "Please explain your thinking?" You look at him like, "Why do you want to know? What's so special

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about what I'm thinking?" They were constantly asking, "What should be happening? What's the standard? What's your current situation? What is your gap? Is it quantifiable? Why are you looking at this particular point in the process?" And they were very inquisitive in wanting to understand your thinking, and also, to develop your questioning, because, as you move up leadership positions at Toyota, it's the expectation that you mentor your subordinates, or the folks that work under you. So, they were starting that questioning with me at an early age. I was very young when I started at Toyota, and that caught on.

I started doing that myself and found myself asking those same questions to the folks that worked for me: my team leaders and it was that type of mentoring that developed our culture.

Joe: So, what you're saying is that problem-solving is really how you lead in with lean, or the questioning is really the core of lean implementation.

Tracey: Yes, it is. I think when you look at organizations; it's kind of difficult, at times. People say, "Oh, I want to implement this tool, or I want to do TPS, or do Just- in-Time." Those are all tools that, most of the time, are countermeasures to some type of problem that they're having. And a lot of times, companies don't understand, "What is the problem that I'm having that I need this tool for a counter-measure?" And I think if you develop the thinking process of your work force, then you're tapping into a potential that most don't take the time to do, because, I think our human capability is very high.

Folks that are out there working a job every day are considered the "professional," in my opinion. They know the ins and outs. If we're developing the thinking at the front lines, all the way up through the president, then you have a powerful dynamic that allows a company to be successful for the long term.

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That's sustainable, and that's a repeatable, continual process. So, the core, I think, of lean implementation, is to understand the problem-solving methodology and the thinking.

Joe: How do you really get a work force engaged in problem-solving? I think about going out there to the line, do they really want to be engaged in it, or do they just want to go in there, get done with their job and go home?

Tracey: Well, I think there's a combination of both, and I think a lot of it is leadership setting the example. If leadership doesn't come down on the floor, and they stay in their office, so to speak, and there's no interaction or engagement and those questions aren't being asked on a daily basis, then, sure, I think you're going to have more of a lackadaisical work force that does just want to do their eight-ten hours and go home. I think it starts with leadership setting the expectation very high that we do have standards. When we are below standards, "What's the expectation of me, at that point?" The leaders have to ask the right questions. It's also good if you visualize your problems in the workplace.

For me, in my experience at Toyota, we had the visual board. Some folks call them the scoreboards. We were always able to see where we are, in regards to the company standard: the expectation of where we should be. When we weren't, we had things like, quality circles that allowed our member engagement at the floor level, to be able to get involved and make change.

That's a way to engage the workforce: suggestion system. We do have kaizen events, or what we call, "Jishuken," which is a problem-solving event. I think, it's up to leadership to really set the example, and set those expectations high for that work force to have, when the manager comes down and they're doing their 'go-and-see' on that daily basis, and sometimes hourly basis, in

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some ways, that the expectation is there to always, "Where am I, in regard to the standard?"

Ask those questions, because, as a leader in the organization, I was always asking questions of my team leaders and team members, "What's happening, what's going on, what should be? Is there any variation today?" It's developing that problem awareness. If you have that engagement, and that buy-in and that conversation, then those folks are going to have a tendency to be more engage in problem-solving. That empowerment can make a difference.

Joe: When you say that you have to be actively engage, what if you're not that type of person that, it's not easy for you to articulate yourself? You struggle to draw those questions out of other people. A lot of people in management have been just telling people what to do for years. Now you need to ask that person, even though you might know the answer yourself, or you think you do.

Tracey: I think that's the key point. In my experience at Toyota, everything was a repetitive type motion; just standardize work, but the questioning, the daily activities, the looking at the key performance indicators like quality, safety, productivity and cost. Looking at those aspects and getting that engagement in that person and saying where are we today in regard to quality, where are we today in regard to safety. It's that repetition, because when I saw my boss or my assistant manager come to the floor, I knew the questions that they would ask. You get used to that. It's a repetition, and you've developed that in your work force of that problem awareness or problem consciousness. It becomes commonplace. It seems difficult to explain, but those questions become repetitive.

When I teach my courses, I go through and talk about the coaching aspect, and what questions do you ask of a leader, as a
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leader of your subordinates and the folks that work under you. So it becomes normal when they start to understand the expectation in their daily activities.

That's where you get that kind of alignment to the company business perspective. Some people call it Hoshin or Strategy Deployment that's when you're getting their engagement and buying, when you're speaking that language on a daily basis.

Joe: So a lot of it is, is just being there and making that walk to the shop every day. Having those conversations, talking to people, so they're not like pulling away from you when you walk up there.

Tracey: Exactly. And I was always told as a leader, 65 to 70% of my role or my job expectation should be coaching, and developing my people. You can't do that from behind your desk. And you also don't want, when your presence as a leader is on the floor for them to think it's a bad thing. Oh, the manager's walking down today, what did we do wrong? We don't want that to happen either.

It needs to become common; it needs to become natural when they see the manager that they're there as what we call a servant leader. They're there to say, what can I do to help you today do your job better and how can we think through it. That's where the problem-solving comes in.

Joe: Explain a little bit to me, on problem-solving, what can I learn by taking a problem-solving course? Is the course a full day course?

Tracey: It depends on your expectations, sometimes I spend three days teaching problem-solving, some days I may only spend four to eight hours. It depends on the company's expectations, but we kind of go through the methodology of just

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understanding the steps and clarifying what are the specific steps, and we clarify the problem and go through the methodology, have some practice in some case studies. Maybe even look at some sample A3's, I even have folks actually grade A3's and tell me what's wrong with them, so to speak. I give them not-so-good A3 examples--and based on what they learned in class and going through the steps and methodology and discussions--then they tell me what could be better, so its immediate application of their knowledge that was learned in class, to put it to use and to see.

There are different learning styles, you've got the kinesthetic, visual, auditory, and a lot of people like that "hands-on" and the ability to be able to work at a problem and do that goal and see. So, we try to bring as much of that as we can when we're in a course where we're not at the Gemba or the work site.

Joe: While you were talking, I thought about the word problems that I had in school and how much I hated them. That's not what you're going to give me on an A3 to look at if I come to your class, is it?

Tracey: Oh, definitely not. Because I don't like the word problems, I personally struggled with those word problems, and I think it's because maybe when I went to school people weren't differentiated by their learning style, and I'm very kinesthetic and visual. So, sitting through and thinking through a word problem was terrible for me, I mean, it was just agony. I think what's really neat about the A3 is it brings out for the visual learner, for the kinesthetic, the hands-on. You're going to go see, you're going to ask questions, you're going to get to look at a process, there's a design to the work and I think it takes you there, instead of sitting behind a desk. Like my trainers used to always say, "please, go to the Gemba, do not solve problem at desk," was some of the things that they say. I think those problems that

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I sat at my desk when I was a child trying to work through, I didn't like that so well, because my learning style is definitely "out there" and in the middle of it, hands on, kind of touchy-feely type problems.

Joe: One question I always have for people because they talk about senior management being engaged, and they talk about the person on the line and standard work; but I always look at that poor middle manager, because he's the guy that has to meet production schedules, meet quality standards, meet all of these different things or it's his job.

He's the guy. He's one of the most crucial parts of any organization. How does he react to something like this? Do the middle managers want the senior managers at the floor level with their people?

Tracey: That's a good question. I think in your typical, traditional manufacturing, your answer would probably be "no". I don't want to see, if I see my senior manager, then that means I'm doing something wrong. And problems are a bad thing, "let's hide the problems" kind of mentality, and I think in my environment that I was kind of brought up in, you want to see your, or at least I was encouraged to see them on the floor because that showed that they were interested in the actual work. You know, a lot of times we say that senior managers are doing the high level stuff and they don't need to understand what's going on the floor, that's what the middle managers should take care of, or in my case, the group leader level. "You take care of the floor; I'll take care of what's going on here."

I think to have that, what we call, kind of catch ball conversation where they come down to the floor, they see what's happening, then I'm able to just discuss issues with them to take back up and maybe I need a resource, or maybe I need a stakeholder involved that's above my level so I have that ability to have that

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conversation to let them know what's happening in the, at the floor level, at the team member level, you know what the morale is about and to have that ability to discuss that with that level or person, I think that's priceless.

I think, you know, it gives the ability for the senior management to, 'cause you know they're responsibility is that strategy deployment and you know and being able to you know, make those indicators in improving quality, safety, productivity and cost and in you know what we call that vertical and horizontal alignment through all the functional areas, not just manufacturing. So they're thinking more strategic but to go out on the floor and actually see what's happening, I think it's powerful.

It kind of reminds me of the show that's on TV now which, I think, "The Undercover Boss, " to me that's going to the Gemba and they actually see what's happening and that's, that show's a prime example of folks coming out of the office and getting to see what's really happening on the front lines and what really runs the company.

Joe: How do you really develop people and organizations? Do you start teaching them problem-solving and teaching them how to solve problems throughout the whole organization at once or do you start with senior management and work your way down or vice versa?

Tracey: In my opinion I think it's very important you know, when a company may contact me and you know we want to do this type of training and you know I'll always ask, "Is your senior management willing to come to the class and sit in and participate and understand if we're going to try to change a culture and the middle managers or the front line folks don't see that buy-in from the top, then sometimes it gets deemed as you know the flavor of the month. Oh, this is another one of those

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courses they're expecting us to do it but when it comes to them, they're high level for some reason, so they don't have to do it.

Sometimes you don't get that buy-in and the culture's very weak. You know in the environment at Toyota, you know people were looked at as the most important asset of a company and they're also the determiner of the rise and fall and so you know it's very crucial to develop each person at each level within their job scope and to understand and see problems through the same lens, if you will. If I'm turning in an A3 to my manager above me and they may be turning it into the person above them then we're all speaking the same language, we're seeing it through the same lens or asking similar questions about the process.

When you start at senior management that mentoring capability comes downward, and they're asking the questions, then the middle management comes down and asks the questions, and it's all consistent. You know, it's lean communication if you will. The A3 is about what I need to know about the problem and it's putting it in a storyboard format so when you start at the top, and it comes down to the workforce, then you have that immediate buy-in I feel and that culture is the strongest when your leaders are walking the walk so to speak.

Joe: You said to me that people have a tendency to jump to the right side of the A3 to solve their problems. Could you elaborate on that but first kind of briefly outline an A3 to me in case someone doesn't have one in front of them or aren't familiar with it?

Tracey: An A3 is in the PDCA format and PDCA, for those of you guys that aren't familiar, is the Plan Do Check Action. Our Lean problem-solving process will follow that. So we start on the left side in understanding what is the problem? What should be happening? What's my gap? Then we look at breaking down the problem into smaller, more manageable pieces. Then we tend to

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prioritize one, and then we go to the process. We look and see what is happening and where in the process is the point of occurrence. Then we set our targets, and that's all done on the left side. So it's kind of a storyboard if you will an 11 by 17 formatted sheet of paper, in boxes, based upon the information in those boxes. So I just described the left side.

Then the right side, if you will, gets you into root cause analysis, developing countermeasures, seeing those countermeasures through, and then being able to get into the check and check the effectiveness. Did the countermeasure address the root cause? What I call "thinking in reverse"-you're going backward through the A3 to test the logic.

Then at the end you're going to standardize the policy you may have changed, the procedure, the practice, or maybe the standardized work. Then it's standardized and then you share that. So the A3 is kind of a way to write down and share with others, communicate with others the problem-solving process or the thinking that you used to be able to share that in a formatted way. Obviously we call it The Lean Problem-solving.

So when we jump to the right side of the A3, as you talked about, what we have a tendency to do when we problem solve is jump to the right side and say, "I already know what the countermeasure is. I'm going to jump there." So you're missing step one, where you identified a problem, or breaking it down, looking at the processes.

We even step over the root cause because we already know what the countermeasure is because we're basing it on our experience maybe, or this has happened before. Nine times out of 10 you're usually just tackling a symptom and the problem comes back. It's because we didn't use a good thinking process or good methodology to get actually to the root cause.

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What drives us to do that is what I call "process versus results." When we get result oriented, and our manager may say, "Hey, I need the answer to this. I need it now. Do whatever it takes. Fix this problem."

When you manage that way, you're telling that person, "It doesn't matter to me how you fix it. Just fix it." Normally that has you jump to the right side of the A3. You're jumping to countermeasures before you ever understand what truly the problem is where is it in the process, and what was the root cause?

Joe: One of the great tools of Lean is the "Five Whys" to get to root cause. Can you explain why you don't use three whys, five whys, seven whys? I mean how did they come up with the five whys and what's that really mean?

Tracey: Right. And it's funny you say that because when I first started in my career at Toyota, everybody was like; "You got to have five whys!" My first question was, "Well, what if it's only two or what if it's three? What if you start asking too many times?" So that was one of my first questions, too, and how it was explained to me is that it's not about five or two or 10. It's about the thought process behind your thinking. Are you asking why? Do you need to go deeper? Do you need to go even deeper when you're asking why?

Because most of the time symptoms are at the surface, and the root cause is normally below the surface. That's getting into the design of the work, into the process, into the specific standardized work steps that folks are doing out there on a daily basis.

Keep asking why allows you to get deeper other than just "Oh, I've got to solve this today. I've got to hurry up and get the answer so I can make my boss happy." That "five why" allows

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you to get into the work, and that's where the answers are is in that work.

I've had many A3s, hundreds of A3s to where they will vary. I might have only two whys, to where I get down to the actual root cause by just asking two. Or I've got examples where I've had 10, and the thing that you want to be aware of is if you ask why too many times. Then it changes the scope of the problem.

I have several examples in class and one of them kind of talks about the alarm clock going off. Well I can ask why. Well the power went out. Well why did the power go out? Well there was a storm. Well why was there a storm? If you keep asking why, you're getting into things that you can't control.

We try to say OK, where is it within the chain, the why chain that I can control that an effective countermeasure will address that root cause and all the symptoms or all the whys up the chain that lead you back to the problem.

You don't want to go too far because again it gets you out of the control, and it changes the scope of the problem. Because if you get in asking about storms and the clouds not liking each other up in the atmosphere, then you're counter measuring something that has nothing to do with your problem. That's when you do the why down test, and the therefore, back up through the chain to establish that cause and effect relationship.

The whys is probably a very difficult piece in the A3 because it takes going to the process. It takes looking at the work and asking those why questions until you get down to the factor that I can make an effective countermeasure on. That takes discipline.

Joe: The other part that I think is really important, when you sit there, and you talk about problem-solving, is everything a

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problem? I mean problem-solving kind of has a negative connotation to it.

Tracey: Yes, I think people sometimes think that "Oh every problem I have, I have to get this A3 out and sit down formally and write this and what is the gap and have this formal process every time we have a problem." And I have this question often in class and what I say is what we're trying to do is to develop your thinking and it becomes intrinsic to you. And what I mean by that is you don't necessarily need an official A3 form to actually solve the problem. You can go through the steps in your mind, ask yourself "What is happening? What currently is going on? What should be? What's the standard? What do we have to base this on? How many times does it happen during the day?"

You can do a lot of problem-solving and narrowing down to the process and get to the root cause without ever getting an A3 out. This happens on an hourly, maybe even minutely basis at Toyota with their andons. An andon is a cord that you pull to say "We have a problem." It could be something very simple. It could be something that it takes two minutes to solve. It could be something that we need to take a little more time at the end of the day or between the shifts, working with the other shifts to solve the problem.

It's the thinking and the questions and the repetition of that that you get better and better to where I don't need an A3 to solve the problem. The A3 is only there for the bigger problems to share this and document this in a storyboard type format. It would need to be filed away to say if we have this again we have documentation of our thinking and what we did.

Try to differentiate between your daily problem-solving and the questions you may ask versus when do I get the A3 out and actually have to document the problem. If I was to shut the line down for 20 minutes, that would require an A3. If I had one little

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scratch on the side of the door, I might do some quick problem-solving asking questions what should be, what's happening. And looking at the environment, what created it, getting down to asking some whys.

I can do that very quickly because I'm versed in the process. That's what we try to do on a daily basis is verse folks, ask those questions and get them used to doing that. So our front lines are very equipped to do that type of problem-solving and that's what the andon is there, that immediate problem id and awareness that there's something that just went out of standard and we need to discuss it.

Joe: I had a podcast one time with Michael Balle, he said the reason the andons was there is to facilitate learning.

Tracey: Yes.

Joe: It's really a learning culture, and I thought that was a great answer because everybody always thinks an andon shuts down the entire line, and everything comes to a halt.

Tracey: Right, right.

Joe: And it's not at all. It's an opportunity to teach and alert.

Tracey: Yes. You're exactly right, and that's a nice way to put it because most folks fear the andon, it's a bad thing, we don't want problems, we want to keep the line running. And it's a paradigm shift for most folks to think about "Oh my gosh, it's OK to stop. We want to stop; we want to learn and we want to prevent this from coming back." Imagine that, to get rid of a problem and not have to deal with it on a daily basis. So you're exactly right. It is about learning and enhancing those skills of our front lines all the way up through to the supervisor.

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Joe: You made a statement that lean is process-focused. Can you tell me a little bit what you mean by that?

Tracey: Yes, when we talk about lean is process focused; there are a lot of processes within lean. You've got your problem-solving process, it follows a methodology. You might have a value stream process that follows work through specific steps and sequence of events that happen. What lean is like you said, we're wanting to see the wasteful action or what's nonvalue added to the customer within those processes. So lean, the core to me is understanding problem-solving and to be able to dig deeper into the work, the design. Why did we design it this way? Who created this? Is this outdated, do we need to look at a different way and continuing to tap into minds of the workforce to get them to think of a better way to do it constantly. That's through problem-solving and understanding standardization is kind of the benchmark for kaizen. Without standards, we can't have any.

When we talk about lean and looking at processes, its understanding as we look, we're looking at it through the lens of asking why are things this way? Can they be better? Can they be improved?

That's digging into the work. And that's where, as leaders, we have to understand the high level thinking of why we're doing it, the purpose, being able to align the organization with a purpose or what some call a true north.

But it's very lean gets you into the work and into the processes, looking for the ways, and as you're doing that, you're asking those questions, why is it this way and how can we improve? So to me it's very oriented around problem-solving and the processes involved in what you do on a daily basis.

Joe: You're putting on a workshop for Lean Enterprise in Indianapolis...

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Tracey: Yes, I think the "Specific Lean Problem-solving" is June the 24th. We're actually doing two sessions. One is the "Managing to Learn, " which is the 22nd and 23rd, which is a two day, that's John Shook's book, "Managing to Learn, " and the "Lean Problem-solving, " is on the 24th.

Joe: Why should I go to your workshop? There are other ones there, why should I go to yours?

Tracey: Well I think, you're right, there is a lot of good activity going on in all of the LEI workshops, but I think when we talk about, looking at making improvements and utilizing tools and coaching, a lot of the courses are going to be around that, to me I think it's important to understand problem-solving first. A lot of times companies will jump to the tools, and they don't understand the usage and they don't understand why they need 'em and I think the tools will raise problems. The Toyota production system is there to raise problems and if we don't arm our workforce, or individuals with a solid problem-solving process or way to think through problems when we bring in these tools, or when we're coaching folks, I think you put the cart before the horse, so to speak.

I think the problem-solving is essential, and the other things fall into place. I can't stress enough, and when folks ask me, we want you to come and discuss lean implementation, where do we start and my first answer, we've got to understand problem-solving before anything else comes together.

That's just my opinion, others may say differently about where to start but I think from what I've read, my experience over the last twenty two years in speaking with a lot of my colleagues that problem-solving and developing a thinking process for your organization is foundational towards continuous improvement and using some of the other tools that are offered in the mini-courses

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the LEI offers, I think it just kind of builds upon and you can improve from there.

Joe: Why do you think problem-solving and even the Socratic questioning, OK, you see that a little bit, but, why do you think that's not taught more in individual, let's say lower level classes or even in high school, really just a basic thing on how to ask questions?

Tracey: I've often asked that question myself and I'm not sure I can answer that fully, I know I have my opinion, you I think sometimes it puts accountability on a person, when you're teaching problem-solving to understand it at a level to be able to teach. For me, doing it at Toyota on a daily basis was one thing, but being able to teach others how to do it and mimic the actions that you need to be as a leader, sometimes is very difficult because problem-solving can be a discipline and a very involved process. It takes a systematic thinking approach and sometimes I think in schools, they just don't get that deep into looking at problems and they're more concerned about core curriculum like math, and math has a lot of problems in it, but you know to be able to think through, what is root causes, I never knew those terms in school, root cause and gaps and processes and how things work, I just don't think we ever dug deep enough into what truly problems were and really to understand the industry or, anything outside of a school workforce.

So I'm not sure, why that isn't more embedded into the curriculum because I think that's a weakness in a lot of companies is that skill to look at what is truly a problem and how do we go about solving it and just speaking through that language because I take it for granted at times because I've been versed in it for twenty two years but when I go to folks that don't understand it, I'm thinking, "Wow, there's a culture out there that doesn't think like I do." You have to go back to the basics and

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understand. It's a great question, and why it isn't in our school systems a little deeper than what it is today.

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

Tracey: Well, I think we've captured the essence. I think it's important. I'm not sure we touched a lot on it, but I think visualization in a workforce of problems, being able to have those scoreboards visual, and for workers to see what's happening in my group or my team in regard to what the company's expectation of me. It's always a visual problem awareness. That gets that engagement and that buy-in. For me at Toyota, when I was there as a leader, we would have our daily meetings at those boards to discuss, "Here's the problems that we're having today." It's very open, very visualized. And I think a lot of companies that I'm working with now are going towards that workplace visualization piece that actually brings the problems to the surface and shows that daily where-am-I-where-do-I-need-to-be conversation.

That drives that engagement and that buy-in that we were talking about earlier of the workforce to see the problems. The Japanese always, "Please make problems visible." And I think that's a key to being able to do the repetition of the problem-solving steps, is to see the problems every day there, look at the trends, and see how the variation is from day to day. So I think that visualization piece is key.

Joe: I think that is becoming more key as time goes on. Someone once told me that if you're not visual, you're not Lean. I thought that put it pretty much in a nutshell there on that. You are also seeing more tools because as we become more reliant on machinery and automation, I think it's harder to distinguish when there is a problem.

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Tracey: Right, people would like to jump to those tools as quick. "This company's doing it, so we need to do it," you know? 5S is always one that "Well, we've done 5S." And my question is, "Why do you need 5S? Let's talk about what the problems you're having that 5S is the countermeasure for?" That sparks a whole different conversation because they never ask that question, "Why do I need it?" versus it's a tool, it sounds good, and it makes everything in its place. But it's about standardization. Standardization is, again, the benchmark to improvement and being able to know when something's out of standard.

But they don't talk themselves through it. I can tell somebody how to do something all day and what to do, but unless we explain the purpose or why it's important, then those tools sometimes lose their value. I think it goes back to understanding problem-solving first. What is my problem? And then those tools can be inserted as countermeasures once we understand our current situation better.

Joe: How can someone get a hold of you?

Tracey: I have a website. So my website is TeachingLeanInc.com, and my email is Traceyr@Gmail.com. Then I also have a blog, which is "thetoyotagal.blogspot.com." So those are ways. You can get a hold of me email or through LEI, so there's various ways.

Joe: I'd like to finish up by thanking you very much, Tracey. The Business901 podcast will be available on my blog and also on the Business901 iTunes store. So again, thank you.

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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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