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Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



Influence your Path to the Leadership Table

Guest was Dr. Jeffrey Soper

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Jeffrey G. Soper, Ph.D., Executive Director of the International Strategic Business Partner Institute, and the creator of Problem Solving Leadership™, the C.L.I.C.K™ Process, and the Organizational Equilibrium Model™. Dr. Soper is a seasoned executive, consultant, author, and coach who is a recognized expert in the fields of leadership development, performance improvement, and creativity and innovation.

Jeff will be presenting at The [ASQ Charlotte Section](#) Annual Conference 2013, *Quality Conference of the Carolinas*. The conference is held at [UNC Charlotte Center City](#) and is a one-day event on April 16th. Additional information and registration can be obtained at <http://www.asqcharlotte.org/ASQ/>.

In his upcoming book Problem Solving Leadership™, Dr. Jeffrey G. Soper challenges the conventional wisdom of current leadership development thought and practice stating that “The problem with leadership can be found in the definition of the leadership problem.” His challenge is not that the focusing upon leadership skills and follower receptivity is wrong, but rather that it is incomplete. Problem Solving Leadership™ contends that perhaps the key element of the leadership problem is missing – the nature of the work to be accomplished.

Transcription of Podcast

Joe: Welcome, everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 Podcast. With me, today is Jeffrey G. Soper. Jeff is the Executive Director of the International Strategic Business Partner Institute, and the creator of Problem

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Solving Leadership, The CLICK Process, and the Organizational Equilibrium Model. Jeff is delivering the keynote and a one-day problem-solving leadership workshop at the ASQ Charlotte Annual Conference on April 16th. Jeff, I'd like to welcome you to the podcast, and I'm glad you could participate in it before heading off to Europe. Is Europe business or pleasure?

Jeff: Well, this trip happens to be a business, Joe. Thank you for the welcome and the introduction. Hopefully, we'll be able to have some leisure time one of the upcoming trips but not this one.

Joe: You concentrate on leadership and the problem-solving aspect of leadership. I guess are leadership problems different in other countries or are they the same.

Jeff: You know it's an interesting question, and the simple answer is they're the same because it's still problems that arise between people and between the interface of people, culture, and work.

Joe: In your LinkedIn bio, you asked a question. Are you an HR, IT, Quality, Accounting Executive waiting for the elusive seat at the table? Could you expand on that?

Jeff: Over the last decade or so, there has been a raging debate amongst that question as to the worthiness and the desire to have a seat at the executive table which represents the ability to have impact and influence on a strategies

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organization; making the decisions, not just implementing. That's been a problem from many functions, especially those that I listed, primarily because frankly, they haven't earned it. They don't have the skills necessary to make an impact in the business.

So, the whole point of starting the institute was to be able to develop the key skills that an individual and staff function needs in order to have influence and be a true strategic business partner.

Joe: As organizations flatten out, we're seeing some definite inadequacies in leadership skills.

Jeff: I think you're absolutely right. The flatter organizations get, which is the objective frankly; the more leadership is relied upon to get the point across, to get an impact in the organization. Leadership is influence based. A simple definition: the ability to influence others in the absence of positional power.

I don't know many IT, HR, quality people that have the ability positionally to direct line staff or line managers, I should say, to do anything, but they do have a lot of technical expertise and they do add a lot of value to the organization. Unfortunately, it gets hidden or ignored because of a lack of ability to effectively communicate and influence.

Joe: Well, I think that's interesting you say that, and I never heard it presented that

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way. When I talk to people at conferences, they say, "Well, yeah, but how do I get leadership to listen to us? You guys always present all these neat things, and we go to these conferences, but how do I get leadership listening to me?" You're saying, "The heck with leadership. It's your ability to influence the leadership and earn that seat at the table is how you get these new things across and the things that you learn."

Jeff: Absolutely. If you wait by the phone for the call, it's not going to happen. The invitation doesn't show up in the mail. You have to earn it, and you earn it by proving that you add value, and you add value by helping to achieve business objectives. It's actually a pretty straightforward equation.

Joe: I think that is interesting. Now, let's define what you mean, maybe by positional leadership. Who are we talking here, any manager or could you define that for me?

Jeff: No. This is a great question, and I make a big distinction between leaders and leadership. Leaders are often vilified. These are people that have positions, and we look at them a little differently than we look at the average person. When I talk about leadership, there are three main components of leadership. There's the knowledge, skills, ability of course. There is recognizing the opportunity to influence. The third one is having the courage to act upon that opportunity, seizing that opportunity appropriately. When you talk about leadership instead of leaders, that means that leadership can be exhibited at any time by any person

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at any level anywhere in any organization.

Joe: Even in a lean way when we look at the scientific method or PDCA is it different when you're attaching the word leadership to it?

Jeff: Yeah, I believe so. I'll tell you here is the difference. This is an evolutionary step. This is not a revolutionary step. Nothing I'm suggesting in problem-solving leadership refutes anything that went before. Before, the majority of the work and the majority of the focus were first on the individual, the "leader", him or herself. What are the skills that you need? Then they came up with problems such as charisma. How do you teach charisma and those types of things?

Then the next evolution in leadership thinking went to the followers. What do the followers need? What are they ready for? There are lots of workouts on that. I'm sure you know many of them. Situational leadership was one of them. There are several others. What was missing in thousands of articles and books that were written, giving examples of what works in one instance but they weren't generalizable with context.

What problem-solving leadership does, it adds the context of the work from the perspective of the nature of the complexity of the work along with the followers and the leadership.

Joe: Problem solving leadership evolved out of the CLICK Process or are those two

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completely different processes?

Jeff: It's a chicken and egg question. When I was at Penn State, when Jack [Matts] and I created the Engineering Leadership Developing Minor there, the first of its kind in the world, Jack is a radical who is very, very focused on creativity and innovation. I am as he used to call me; a blue suit suck up that's focused on change and leadership. Well, somehow we got our peanut butter, and chocolate mixed up together and we put those components together, and we discovered that there is a process for creativity and innovation. That is what the CLICK Model is all about.

Essentially, creativity leads to innovation. Innovation leads to change. Change leads to knowledge. And knowledge is the basis for creativity. The problem is that is not a natural cycle. It doesn't flourish in and of itself. You need to have the environment for that cycle to operate, and that's where the leadership component came in, and that's where we were able to make things click. That's how it got its name.

So, the CLICK Model is all about creativity, and I believe creativity is the foundation for all progress, all innovation in organizations. I know, as an academically qualified person when I say all it makes it suspect but believe all is dependent on creativity and innovation. But, leadership has to exist in order to create that, and that's again, leadership at all levels, not just the C-Suite.

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Joe: I always go to the 99% model or solution because they always say that I love to say, 1% is inspiration, and 99% is perspiration. Does it have to be that hard? Does good leadership make that flow better?

Jeff: Good leadership changes that whole dynamic. It changes that equation dramatically. It drops that 1% or I should say it increases that 1% dramatically. It's still hard work, but it's not nearly the challenge as introducing a new idea or a creative idea in an environment where they're just not interested. They might say they are, but they're just not interested.

That gets us to the difference between creative and critical thinking. In critical thinking, we're taught how to look at a statement or idea or concept and figure out what's wrong with it. Creative thinking, on the other hand, is looking at that same concept, that same idea, that same notion and seeing what is right about it or what could be built upon.

When we start to use both sides of this thinking equation, both creative and critical, that's when we start to get some real results. It doesn't happen unless you have the right environment, and the environment is created by leadership. Again, not the C-Suite, not even the managers, it's the organizational leadership.

Joe: Again, what we're saying, we're going back to the fact that this is something that can be learned. I mean, I don't have to come out of my mom's womb as a Steve Jobs or a George Patton or something.

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- Jeff: You're right, and that was the promise. In fact, I used to, in the early days, especially with very bright college students in engineering; I'd ask the question, is leadership, can it be learned or are you born with it? It was the first question in the class. I used to do that in workshops as well, and anybody who said, "Well, you're born with it," I just asked them, "Why are you here?" It makes no sense that you're here if you believe that it can't be learned. Yes, it absolutely can be learned.
- Joe: The best way to learn it can I learn it from a book or do I have to practice it?
- Jeff: There's the rub with academia. I personally believe that leadership is developed. It's not studied. You can read a book, and you can get ideas, just like you can read a book about fishing and get some ideas, but until you actually go try it and see what works and see what doesn't and try it again and try it again and keep honing your skills and practicing, that's how you develop leadership.
- Joe: You're a leadership professional, fabulous resume, a lot of background in it, but then I noticed something on it, is you got involved in this contaminated world of sales. Okay? How did you evolve into that and what do you do in that area?
- Jeff: Well, it's another great question, and like most things in my life I kind of took a next logical step and that's where I found myself. I left academia for a couple of reasons, but one of the primary reasons was I wanted to have greater reach. At

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the bottom line, I am selling this concept of leadership, problem-solving leadership and creativity because I want to make a difference. At the end of the day, it's still sales. It's still marketing. Only it's a concept; it's not a product. So, sales was the logical next step for me to evolve to.

Joe: Most of is considered around B2B sales and more specifically the challenger sales. Could you explain what that is and how that has influenced you?

Jeff: This whole notion of the challenger sales was captured in a book by Dixon and Adamson. That's a free plug for them, but essentially what it does is refutes the age-old relationship-based selling. If you have the relationship you can get in the door, if you can get in the door you can make the sales.

The Challenger Sale is simply an approach where you're leading through insight. It's solution selling. What is it that you have a problem, organization A when you're talking to a representative of that company? What are the biggest problems? I like to call it, what's in your too hard basket? Then let me understand what that is and see if I can help fix it.

But, I'm also going to give you something. I think Accenture when it was Anderson Consulting, did this best with the whole idea of change practice. They created the field by educating their potential clients what change management was. When their potential clients realized that they needed some support or help or insight concerning change management, who do they go to? They went to

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Anderson Consulting/Accenture. That's the heart of challenger sale, and I'm just taking that concept and I'm applying it.

Joe: Well, I think it fits your description of the problem-solving leadership, how you approach that because it is challenging and developing. It's kind of the next evolution of problem solution selling.

Jeff: Yes, it appears to be. The research is nice, but it just makes sense. In application, it's nice to see the reaction. There are a lot of people out there that have far greater networks of relationships than I do, but it's not difficult to get into meaningful conversations when you're talking sharing insight and looking for solutions.

Joe: Now, we want to have a high-performance culture in our entire organization. Sales have never been part of the culture. It's always been measured on results. That's how we compensate people in that area. What's different about building a compatible sales culture with an organization?

Jeff: Let me walk down the value chain here a little bit as I see it from a leadership perspective. Making the business case, especially in the quality world, the HR world, people are looking for the business case. Make the business case for us. I believe organizations add value by solving problems, whether it's a market demand or market desire, whether it's fast or whether it's cheaper, it's more embellished with more features and more benefits. It doesn't matter. It adds

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value. It solves a problem.

The degree to which that problem is effectively solved is often represented by an organization's revenues. The efficiency of how that problem is solved by the organization is often measured by profitability. But in order to get those solutions it goes right back to creativity and innovation, people coming up with ideas for solving problems that they have both internal and external.

In order to come up with those ideas there has to be an appropriate environment. Again, we go right back to the environment is created through leadership, hence, problem-solving leadership.

Joe: Can sales be a compatible culture with what I'd call a high performing organization?

Jeff: It's interesting. I believe that those people that are best at sales, regardless what the economy is, people that come back with orders not excuses no matter what, those are individuals who are more than likely, when you start to scratch the surface as to why they are the exemplars, why do they outperform their peers?

They're outperforming their peers because they're adopting high-performance perspective and high-performance tools such as challenger sales, selling through insight, selling solutions, not figuring out why they're not selling. Figure out how

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to meet the needs and expectations and solve the problem of their customers.

Joe: In your program, that you're putting on at Charlotte, I was going through it and looking at different topics, and you don't necessarily profess to be a lean guy or a six sigma guy in your things, but you seem more influenced by Lean and just looking at the mood and the lean movement there. Can you give me a little background on how lean works into your principles?

Jeff: Another great question, and no, I'm not naturally a lean guy, however, I have managed manufacturing operations. So, I understand the whole statistical process of control and the reporting and many of the items that are key in the lean philosophy. That's the way I like to talk about the lean philosophy, not the bag of tools, but the philosophy behind it.

When I read the Toyota Way and the Seven Deadly Wastes, it just struck me, based on everything we talked about up to this point that something is missing. And what's missing is the creativity and talent element, and none of the other seven can be solved if you don't have that eighth muda, that eighth waste addressed. So, that's how I got involved with the lean, and it was really through experience.

I was an early adopter of management by walking around. I spent a lot of time in manufacturing facilities walking around talking to people that were closest to the work. And I'd ask questions like, "How can we make this better?" And I

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discovered that virtually every time I asked that question there were a couple of ideas that came back. Now, I don't know if they were good or bad all the time, but they were ideas.

And I asked myself, where do these ideas go? It's like the socks in the dryer. Where do they go? And oftentimes they went nowhere. So, I started paying attention to those ideas, therefore creating the environment where those ideas could be shared. Therefore, I have more ideas and better ideas. You put them on a tape and you start scratching them with other people doing the same or similar job, all of the sudden people start to figure out how they could make improvements rather than why it wouldn't work.

Again, this ties right back to that whole CLICK Process. I wish I could tell you one came first and then the other than the other, but it was just this giant conversion of influences to my thinking and to my professional life that resulted in these models and this whole philosophy.

So, the lean philosophy works perfectly with what I'm speaking about because we're talking about eliminating waste. I believe the deadliest of all the waste is wasted talent and untapped creativity.

Joe: What would someone take away from your workshop?

Jeff: What I hope that people will get from this workshop, and I'm pretty sure they

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will is the impact environment has on performance, the difference and power between and combination of critical and creative thinking, and I firmly believe that you have to be able to try this stuff and apply tomorrow, not next week, not next year, not when the sun rises, tomorrow.

So, we're going to go through a number of different activities and discussions that are guided to how can you apply what we talked about in these areas. And in problem-solving, looking at the type of work, being that context I talked about earlier. How do you start to determine that and how can I apply this tomorrow when I go back to work?

Joe: When I walk out of your workshop I'm not going to have an excuse to look over my shoulder and say that leadership's not going to do this or do this. I'm going to have some steps that I can influence leadership with.

Jeff: You're absolutely right. I did a blog a short while ago, and I created an activity called, If I Were King, and in groups I asked people if you were king what would you change. It's easy to list all the things that they'd change, but when we went back and looked at the nature of things that they wanted to change, oftentimes, many of them were self-imposed constraints and the others were things that didn't require permission, things that people could just do.

Joe: What is upcoming for you?

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Jeff: As a matter of fact, I'm taking a little bit of a deep breath. I need to finish "Problem Solving Leadership" book and "Making Things CLICK", so those books are to hit the shelves within the next couple of months, "Problem Solving Leadership", obviously before the conference in April so we're there. There are just some things I need to do. I'm working with a couple organizations to flesh out the assessments and the work on the eighth muda and how to eliminate it.

So, that's been the focus that I've been rearranging my schedule to support, and I have been fortunate enough to have a couple of organizations that have stepped up and wanted to participate in this journey with me.

Joe: "Problem Solving Leadership" is it going to be out soon?

Jeff: Yes. It was supposed to be out this month. There are some illustration issues that are being resolved, but it will be out in the month of March, and I will be unveiling it, essentially my first visit with the book under arm, will be the April Leadership Development Day.

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

Jeff: Thank you for asking. I'm on LinkedIn. Obviously, the Facebook for adults as I call it, professionals at least. And we'll have a website fully operational with contact information here within the next couple of weeks. But I'm always available by email [jsoper](mailto:jsoper@isbpi.org), S-O-P-E-R at I-S-B-P-I, dot org (jsoper@isbpi.org).

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

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