



Implementing Lean Marketing Systems



### Lean Training and Simulation Tips

Dusiness 91

Guest was Jamie Flinchbaugh



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**Jamie Flinchbaugh** is a co-founder and partner of the Lean Learning Center in Novi, Mich., and brings successful and varied experiences of lean transformation as a leader, practitioner and facilitator. Under Jamie's leadership, the Lean Learning Center has become in just four years one of the most recognized and premiere lean providers in the world. The Lean Learning Center's clients include Harley-Davidson, Land O Lakes, Intel, Simmons Foods, ZF and Guidant including their Industry Week's Best Plant winner among many other world-class companies.

Before the Lean Learning Center, Jamie was part of the development, training and implementation of the Chrysler Operating System, a widely-benchmarked lean change program spearheaded by Lean Learning Center partner Dennis Pawley. Jamie was also with

DTE Energy as a lean thought leader to help build the first Lean program in a utility and to transform operations and leadership of the utility industry towards a philosophy of lean.

Jamie is a frequent writer and speaker on lean and continuous improvement. Articles include the popular *Beyond Lean, The Extraordinary Vision of Henry Ford, Transforming How We Work* and others for various industry magazines. He has also written a training video called *Learning Lean Through Simulation* released by SME (The Society of Manufacturing Engineers) and is co-author of the best-selling book <u>The Hitchhiker's Guide to Lean: Lessons from the Road</u>.

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#### **Transcription of Podcast**

**Joe Dager**: Welcome, everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of Business901 Podcast. With me today is Jamie Flinchbaugh. Jamie is a co-founder and partner at the Lean Learning Center in Novi, Michigan. He is co-author of the book "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Lean," and most recently published an eBook, "A3 Problem Solving." Jamie is not only a teacher of Lean, but also a practitioner in the several companies that he participates in. I consider Jamie one of the leading experts in the Lean world and a follower of his blog at jamieflinchbaugh.com. Jamie, I would like to welcome you back to the podcast. It must be fun to have a weekend home. Have you been enjoying yourself or has boredom set in?

**Jamie Flinchbaugh**: No, boredom rarely sets in. It's good to be home for a day and to talk to you again. It's been a while since our last podcast together.

**Joe**: You have always been as much a teacher, I believe, and maybe even more so, than a consultant. How did the Lean Learning Center get started?

**Jamie**: The Lean Learning Center got started to try to solve some of what we considered to be the larger problems in Lean journeys. Specifically, that Lean has to be about the thinking, that leaders have to be engaged, and not just supportive, and the strategy for change has to adapt to the specific needs of the organization. We started the Lean Learning Center 11 years ago to try and solve those problems, and those remain the problems we work on today. It started with Andy Carlino, Dennis Pawley and me. Most consultants print a couple of business cards and now have a consulting company, but we actually, opened up a 6,000 square foot training center, which was designed for adult learning, to try and teach differently lean principles. We made the rather rare step,

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especially for a startup consulting company, of actually building our own dedicated training center, specifically around the kinds of things we were trying to teach.

**Joe**: I can only imagine having a training facility of that size when starting out. I can remember when I started a manufacturing company; I had two file cabinets set in the middle of the floor and overhead doors not quite big enough to get a product out. I sat there and just looked around. It had to be a very similar feeling having 6,000 square feet of a training center.

**Jamie**: We started off quite a few classes there in the very first year. Some of them were private, for some of our larger clients and some of them public enrollment classes, like we still run today. When we are not running a class, it is a rather large office space just to sit in, but we're not in it much unless we're running a class there.

Joe: Is it more classroom type training at the learning center?

**Jamie**: As a company, not necessarily. We spend a lot of our time coaching people in the field. We spent a lot of our resources and a lot of our time doing that at client sites, in the work, sleeves rolled up. But the learning center itself, workspace located in Michigan, is a learning environment. I wouldn't call it a training environment because even when we try to design training programs, it's not just training of information. We really try to design the right learning experience for people. Our goal is to get people to understand and internalize, and not just get the right information, so a lot of training is focused on information. We really try to go beyond information to internalization, and so, we often adopt some different learning techniques to try and accomplish those things.

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**Joe**: I think you can just look at your website and tell that. It contains a lot of simulations, single point exercises, and few other things like that, but there seems to be a concentrated effort to have interactive products. Is that how you look at your training also?

**Jamie**: We look at learning as a combination of inputs for people. It is ultimately something we need to experience and practice and challenge ourselves with, in addition to designing an environment designed for interaction. We have seven-foot whiteboards on wheels, and we can reconfigure the room anyway we want. Beyond that, our simulations, we've developed probably around 15 different simulations for different purposes. Each one says, what do we want somebody to learn and then how do we design the learning experience for that need? The learning experience could be anything from reading to on the floor activities to reflection activities to role modeling and then about 15 different simulations, each trying to convey a specific or design learning objective.

**Joe**: Well, you talk about the different numbers of simulations you have, and one of them is the Mouse Trap game, which is probably one of your more popular ones I would think. Can you briefly describe it? I know it's on your website, and someone can read about it, but just tell me what it is and what's the benefit from an instructional standpoint to go through it?

**Jamie**: Sure. Well, the Mouse Trap experience, it is one of our more popular simulations. It's based on the long-standing board game Mouse Trap. So we leverage this threedimensional contraption that makes Mouse Trap what it is as a platform for experimentation, and the way we run it, it's nice and short. It's about 90 minutes, and it's not a manufacturing process. It's not a business process. It's a board game. So the folks

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that sit in manufacturing simulation and say, well I am in the business process, and so that doesn't apply to me and vice versa. Well, this is Mouse Trap. So it doesn't apply to anybody so get over it and just focus on the learning.

It's pretty easy to immerse yourself in, but the idea is we run people through a process where we get to some...without getting into any tools, some basic fundamentals of improvement: the idea, like understanding current state first, the idea of small step experimentation, changing one thing at a time, standardization, and the ability to structure the work.

These are some basic fundamentals that regardless of what tools you have, apply for continuous improvement, and so we basically try to weave some of those fundamentals into a short, high energy, fun learning process that applies...we've had it with doctors and brain surgeons and engineers and high school students.

So, all sorts of different folks because again, it's based on the board game Mouse Trap, so the learning can apply to anybody.

**Joe**: So when you introduce the game to them, is it right after, let's say a certain classroom exercise that leads them into it?

**Jamie**: Yes. So our use of it might be...we might have a specific course design that we're using for a client, and they have certain learning objectives, so we then put together the agenda. So we might have some lead-in teaching. This might be a chance to apply some of that teaching, and then we go back and reflect, and most of our course designs follow that learn - apply - reflect model where you learn something, get it in your head, you apply it,

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and you get to do something with it, and then you reflect, and the reflection which we have many different mechanisms for is connected back to your own real world.

So you connect the experience to what you learned in your head, so you always start to believe it.

Mouse Trap is also used by a lot of our clients, and they'll maybe design their own curriculum whether it's four hours or it's one day or it is 25 days; they design their own curriculum; they needed some way to pull some of those key points together, and so the Mouse Trap experience becomes one of those mechanisms to do that.

**Joe**: Do your players engage right away? Do you have to warm them up or do something with them to get them to engage or do you see them jumping right into it?

**Jamie**: With this particular simulation, there is no warm-up period required, and there are a few, because of their complexity that we have designed that take it a few steps, you have to walk through a couple of steps before people really understand it and get warmed up and get going, but with the Mouse Trap experience, actually getting energy into it is actually our least concern. We often do the opposite. We have some of our clients that won't let people sit near it until they've given all the instructions because they're so anxious to get going. They are so ready to compete and to play really.

That energy they just can't help themselves and they start running off and doing stuff, and we haven't even given them the instructions yet.

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So with this particular game because of the three-dimensional nature of it, because it reminds us of our childhood, because of the board game nature of it, for various reasons, there is a really...absolutely very easy for people to engage in right away.

**Joe**: Do you see a difference activity wise from a gender or from an age standpoint or maybe even a position, maybe a CEO versus a line worker? Is there a difference in the engagement aspect of the games?

**Jamie**: There is a difference, but I think it has more to do with learning styles than any other demographic that I can identify. We see CEOs and technicians engaging with the same vigor. We have had to catch CEOs and general counsels from cheating and their competitive nature of playing the game. So we haven't found anything that's saying demographic or anything like that, but there are different learning styles, and some people really engage in experiences like that very quickly, and others who are less kinesthetic learners will take a little longer.

For me, personally, based on my learning styles, I don't learn as well in simulations as many other people do. Now, I use them because they work, but for me, it's not my preference. So, A, when we're designing a class, we try to mix styles so that regardless of people's learning style, they get hit by a little bit of everything.

And B, when you integrate them, you experience all the learning styles at the same time, which is most powerful. There's always been a chance where we put people through some of these simulations and wondered, including the mousetrap experience, and wondered, "Is this a group that this is really going to speak to?" And sure enough, off they run, and it doesn't seem to be a problem.

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**Joe**: Do you think it's attributed to learning styles if you see someone hanging back or someone not quite engaging?

**Jamie**: Yeah, that can be one of the signs. Now, we just have to be really careful about over-reading any body language. I tend to, for example, fidget in my chair, but it's more because I have bad knees than I'm not paying attention. So, you have to be careful about over-reading anybody's body language. But, certainly, trying to find the most passive role, trying to hang back - that would certainly be a sign, and it could be because it doesn't fit their learning style.

It could be just because they just don't want to engage, and it could have nothing to do with the class. They could be having a bad day. Everybody has bad days.

**Joe**: Sure. Do you see different roles assumed easily? Do you trade off? Do you see the CEO becoming an operator in a board game? Or do you see organizational structure maintained within a game?

**Jamie**: Only in the most extreme conditions do we see any of that organizational structure maintained. Generally, once people start getting into it, they understand their role. They also understand there are limited consequences other than pride and learning. They still want to win. They still want to do well. They don't want to fail, but people adapt to the structure. we put them in, pretty quickly. We've seen some extreme conditions where maybe that wasn't that case.

I can remember a situation where there was going to be a significant management layoff at the company, and their fate was in someone else on their team's hands. So they didn't

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want to let down their teammate for fear it would impact whether or not they had a job or not.

Now that's a pretty extreme condition, but, for the most part, we see CEO as a team member and a technician could be their supervisor, and they adapt to those roles pretty quickly.

**Joe**: Do you see that people always enjoy the game? Do they enjoy the game atmosphere and being mixed in with each other?

**Jamie**: It's not for everybody. As long as it's mixed with other things, for people who it doesn't speak to them, it doesn't fit their learning styles, like me, you tolerate it because it's part of the process. If it was standalone and that's all you were going through, it'd be a little less intolerable, but you aren't gaining as much. You're more going through it because it's part of the process; so for people whose learning style it doesn't work for as well, if you combine that with impatience as a personality trait, they might not stick with it as well. We don't always give them a choice.

The facilitator and the structure still need to maintain control of the participants and the atmosphere. It's not like we give them a choice just to opt out.

But you can certainly see folks who don't want to, for the most part. That's OK, and we're not trying to solve that problem for them. It speaks to many people's learning styles. We never use it in isolation of others.

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So even though those folks may not enjoy being in that role, they do what they need to do because it's part of the process.

**Joe**: I'm always amazed at how people get into the flow of a game and the engagement in the game, and they move away from reality sometimes. Do you see people getting that engaged in some of these games?

**Jamie**: Absolutely. Sometimes to the extremes, but we have a simulation that's part of our lean experience where the participant is between running the simulation, working on it, analyzing it, redesigning it, debriefing...They spend about ten hours in a week in this simulation. That's a pretty big investment of their time, and we have many of the folks telling us they dream about it.

**Jamie**: They go home, and they can't stop thinking about it. They're thinking about how to make it better. We're ready to start at eight, and they're coming in at six-thirty in the morning, ready to go. We haven't even made the coffee yet. People get an awful lot of energy into this. They immerse themselves. I joke with them that they can't put their performance in the simulation on their performance review at work, but based on their behavior; you would think that some of them thought that was exactly what would happen.

Joe: When you have rewards in a game, does that change the game?

**Jamie**: We rarely do that. Many times it might be a reward for everybody. We find the reward would have to be pretty significant to outweigh the reward of recognition. We find in the end that people do want to win. If they're competing against other teams, they want to do well. They want to see the scoreboard, and they want to see how they fared on the

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scoreboard. So even if there's some award, it's that pride of winning. In fact, many folks, their friends will be on another team, and their main concern is beating their friends.

We find that competitive nature and the pride of wanting to perform well, in general, is about as motivation as people need enough to take it seriously.

**Joe**: Is there an ongoing scoreboard where people are keeping track of other people and a lot of the simulations to push them during the game?

**Jamie**: It depends on the nature of it. How interactive they might be able to be. How isolated they might be. There's definitely a tendency to want to see how other folks are doing. Which, of course, we believe even in business, you should pay more attention to your own performance than your competitors that we believe is even true when it does matter how you perform.

**Jamie**: Even in a simulation, it's a hard behavior for people to drop. They still want to know how other folks are doing.

**Joe**: Is there any short-comes in using a game? Is there something that a game lacks in when you're trying to teach somebody something?

**Jamie**: Fundamentally, it's concocted. It's a controlled, isolated, concocted environment. We try to avoid tricks and gimmicks so that it's not overly concocted - it's still a real experience. But it's not real, in the end. By design, it's not as complex, as nuanced, as challenging, and as emotional as real work and real application are. That's just the limitation of it. You can condense time; you can condense space; you can do a lot of things

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safely in a simulation or a game that you can't do in real life at that speed, but, again, it's not real.

Because of that, there's just a limitation that, what you learn in that is not always directly applicable. It's directionally applicable, but not directly applicable. Taking that lesson and then trying to apply it in real life, still is a lot harder, and so that's one of the reasons we spend a lot of our time coaching because it is the real-life application that is the most difficult.

Because the organizations are complex, the world is complex, people are complex. It's a lot harder to go change a customer service process than it is to change the mouse trap board game.

**Joe**: Do they use any of these games repetitively within an organization, or is it just a one-time thing?

**Jamie**: For most, it's a one-time thing. There are folks that will go back through the same experience as a reminder of everything they learned. But, in essence, it is a learning experience. In many cases, even if you've been through it before, if you designed it well, that's still not necessarily an advantage. So if you design the experience well, people having been through it before, won't necessarily be an advantage. But we will see people go through it multiple times, but more as a reminder, just like you might read a book again.

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It's not new to you, but it's a good reminder; it's a good refresher; it brings back all the thoughts you had when you read it the first time. It's a way to maybe re-inject some energy and some, like I said, some reminders into what you had learned the first time.

**Joe**: Have you ever had a game that just bombed, before? That in the middle of it, you wondered what you were doing there, or why you were doing it?

**Jamie**: That's a good question. I did go through that experience once. Not with one that we had designed, but it was with somebody that they had designed. I was sitting through it to give feedback, and there was just an execution flaw based on how it was designed, and because it was executed wrong, you couldn't get from here to there. I was a participant in it; I literally sat down and looked at the rest of my team members and said, "I don't know what to do next." I literally had to wait for someone to come and save us, because they had done it wrong and because of that, we were literally stuck. We were dead in the water. We really try to make sure that our facilitator guides, in our training the folks on running it themselves, that they know all the things that could go wrong and know how to avoid them.

Because executing it poorly can be a big problem and in the end, if people feel cheated, or feel wronged, that experience can be propagated to the rest of their learning, not just the simulation learning, but the rest of things.

We also had a simulation design; that simulation designed bombed. The simulation itself actually worked pretty well, but unfortunately relied on a supply of material which was highly unreliable, and so our ability to replicate it was very, very challenging, and I think

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we probably put more effort in buying materials, and that we ever put into actually running the thing.

That was a design flaw, but it was still a fun experience and made the learning objective. Part of the question is, can we still believe in PDCA in everything we do. So, we design, and we have very clear objectives that we evaluate ourselves against. We do the check against.

We do dry runs, actually not dry runs; we do pilot runs with the safe audience where we can test things out. We then do full runs, which are still PDCA cycle, and we continue from there. So, our simulations there are 10 years old, we are still continuing to improve.

But we really try to make sure that we have tested the conditions and the process well enough before we release anything for real use.

**Joe**: Do you sell several of these games on your website? Of course, the best is to experience the game and have an instructor show you the game or go through them when you are in classes, but can someone purchase these and do a decent job introducing it to their organization?

**Jamie**: Yeah, absolutely! And that's how we designed it. Some of our simulations are about less than the price of us coming to visit a client for one day. So, that's why we designed it to make it accessible for people. We have our own structural design studio. We do curriculum development for clients. Many clients feel like they can develop their own curriculum, which is fine, and more power to them, but designing their own simulations

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maybe another level. So, they might buy these simulations and integrate them into their programs.

Now if they never stood in front of a group before, and they have never heard of Lean before, it's going to be hard to open up this box and do a good job of it. But, that's not usually the expected facilitator audience for these types of things.

Usually, it's folks that have at least had some experience even if it's just giving a speech to the gang, standing in front of the crowd, and they know a little about why they're teaching it. They may not be experts in Lean, but that's OK, that's not necessary.

So, we tried it before we released it as a public simulation meaning; it's on our product's page. You can buy it off the shelf. We have made sure that it's highly tested. It has been run through a lot of times, and the facilitator materials are actually far more than you should need, cover nuances of how you set up, how you run it, what questions you ask, what problems you run into, how you break it down.

So, we really try to give people everything they would possibly need to be successful right out of the box, and then of course, if they have questions, they follow up and ask questions, which we are happy to answer as well.

Since we started the center, we always try to make our services as accessible as possible, so that the large company, the small company, the local company, the overseas company; we have tried to make it accessible as possible. So, this was one of the ways we can do that.

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We know companies that we have never been able to...they may have wanted to bring us in for consulting help, they couldn't afford it, but they can bring one of the simulations and do their own training, and off. they run. So, that's how we try to design it, and that's why we have instructional designers on the staff is to try and meet those objectives.

**Joe**: Has there been more talk in the organization about game simulation and how gamification may help your learning more?

**Jamie**: That's a good question. Most of our learning has been through the experience. I have read articles, and we have certainly studied instructional design, and we brought on professional instructional design. We have met some folks that specialize in this, and we worked with them a little bit and learned from them. But most of our learning has been really learning as we go. So, first simulation I was part of the design, was back in 1994 and have been doing it ever since.

Been through a lot of learning cycles at what works and what doesn't, that's how we have done it. I am sure there are people who lot more about this than I do, that we can learn a lot from. I would be curious as to other people answering that question because I am sure there are a lot more than we can learn that we hadn't learned from our own little PDCA cycles.

**Joe**: Well, the reason that prompted that question was, really when you look at, let's say the gaming world, for lack of better description. They build such a good system; that's easy to learn to get started with, and then it's hard to master, so, there is repetitive usage. As you mentioned, they use it one time, or they use it in a training atmosphere with first-time learners but there is not that repetitive usage in a lot of them and that's what

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prompted that question in my thoughts about it. I don't have an answer; they were my thoughts, so that's why I ask.

**Jamie**: No, that's I think is the right question. We have developed some of our knowledge of all this has been, I'll say quantified, and we know some of the things to do from a design standpoint, from a practicing standpoint, from a learning experiencing standpoint. We know some of the things to avoid. As I mentioned earlier, we try to avoid any tricks or gimmicks where somebody can feel like they were tricked, which can deter from the learning experience. We don't think like we are expert enough that we could truly quantify that knowledge into something, wholly transferable to others.

So maybe they weren't interested in learning more from others, but most of our learning has been through observation of other's experiences and our own PDCA cycles, and it has served us pretty well, but I am sure there's a lot more we can learn.

**Joe**: Is there something that I didn't ask that you would like to add about your simulation or the different products on your website?

**Jamie**: We have more coming out, which we are working on right now called the credit card simulation, which is designed to be a complex business process, and really designed to teach activities connection flows and how you experiment your way through that improvement cycle. So, we are continually coming up with new ones. Some of them are released as public products; some of them are ones that we can use ourselves. But maybe a point to just emphasize as companies think about that, that we only touched on briefly is is how people make that choice.

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We see too often, in fact, just yesterday I got an email from somebody saying, "Well, can use this simulation over here and over there?" There is a tendency to want to use the simulation first and then figure out what you want to learn from it. It's really essential that people got that the other way around.

What are your learning objects? Then figure out. What's the learning experience you give them to help meet those objectives. They will say, "Hey, we love the deer game. We do the deer game." Well, why, why do you want to do it? What's your learning objective? What are you trying to accomplish?

People like to do simulations because they are fun, because they engage people because they inject some energy, but unless you are trying to accomplish something specific with the learning objectives, it could become unproductive. We end up asking that question quite often, what are your learning objectives?

Because, one you should be doing it for a purpose, and two is, most simulations aren't good at meeting 10 different army objectives. We will design them around two or three maybe, but 10 gets to be a bit much, so, then you really want to be clear what your objectives are and then pick the right experience to meet those objectives.

**Joe**: I think that's a great point. What is on the horizon for the Jamie Flinchbaugh and Lean Learning Center?

**Jamie**: Well, perhaps nothing big. We continue to understand what are the clients' problems and challenges, and how can we create methods, tools, services that help them overcome them, and the messages that we have been on, what are new and innovative

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ways for us to get those in the place. So, lately we have been working on, as I mentioned, the credit card simulation which is also part of going C workshop which really a process of learning how to observe in your own company, in your own process.

What experimentation really looks like and feels like and the goal is to get people to turn the PDCA wheel many, many times in a short period of time. And so it's just a different structure, on some hands-on learning that we have continued to refine and starting to launch as a new product.

And those are just what are currently on the play. We are always trying to take small steps and continue to again pay more attention to our clients and their needs than our competition. So, what innovative ways can we, maybe solve some of their problems.

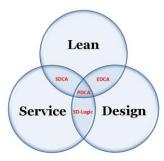
**Joe**: What is the best way for someone to contact you?

**Jamie**: Either through the contact page the Lean Learning Center or leanlearningcenter.com or jamieflinchbaugh.com or email me directly at Jamie@leanlearningcenter.com I am usually pretty good at responding, not immediately, usually with a client, but we get back to people pretty quickly.

**Joe**: Thanks, Jamie, it's been a great pleasure. I think you gave some real added insight.

Jamie: Thank you, Joe!

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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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