



We are living in a new world order—one in which crisis and turmoil are the “new norm.” This new norm includes increasing energy costs; the economic disruptions caused by war; climate changes that cause debilitating droughts as well as floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes; and political discontent that stirs currency fluctuations and disturbs energy supplies. As fuel costs continue to rise, we are going to have to find ways to do business differently. If we want to continue to survive in this kind of turmoil, what must we do?

Following Toyota's example, we must learn to apply—or reapply—lean principles to those things we can control in our own organizations. The first step is to go back to the basics—revisit and rejuvenate your own lean efforts and look for ways to apply lean principles in the short term to exert control over the variables you can control.

Do you have an enterprise-wide mindset of eliminating waste in every part of your business? The “seven wastes” are still important and should be part of a daily mantra. If weeds have started to grow, they must be removed.

What about your supply chain? We have for a long time taken an adversarial approach with suppliers. Creating live, synchronous partnerships is critical.

We must learn to get closer to our customers—to uncover unarticulated needs and the compromises they're making. We need to become “delighters” again and not just supply our customers with “me too” products. Getting close to your customers is essential to rooting out wasteful products, services, and behavior.

Get close to your own people. There's no better time to let them know you care, and if you do, they will invest in helping you change the controllable elements of your enterprise. Remember LeanSigma means doing more with fewer resources and repositioning people to help leverage the gains made through lean. Make sure you broadcast the game strategy: lean is there to help eliminate waste so that the organization is right in sync with the customer's actual demands. Then you leverage that to grow and it's a win-win situation for you, your customers, and your employees.

Energy costs in some plants are even higher than people costs. Conducting energy kaizens will not only help you save money, but it could save the plant and, ultimately, the planet. Consider your transportation costs as well. Lean value chain teaches us to look at total landed costs of products. We have to learn how to make our work local—coupled with the local economy and using local ingredients and local supplies.

The last—and most critical—element is unwavering, focused, and committed leadership. The number one factor in mobilizing a work force to optimize a business in troubled times is passion. Lead by example and focus on a few critical things. Don't try to change everything today. This is where a policy deployment process is essential. It gives you the discipline to deselect and focus on only those things that

are going to make a difference now.

Talent multiplication is more important than ever today. You need people who are aligned with your vision, who are not afraid to make a change or take risks, and who are not going to back off at the first sign of resistance.

Several articles in this issue reinforce the value of the lean basics, including the feature on Steinway & Sons (p. 2) and articles on talent multiplication (p. 8), lean product development (p. 12), leader standard work (p. 16), and lean management accounting (p. 17).

Whether you are working on your culture, your finances, or your design procedures, or just attempting to be more environmentally sound, lean is the process that will get you there. If you're already lean, the tools are there and have been there a long time—it's just a matter of having the focus and discipline to derive a strategy that supercharges the lean effort as a bulwark against the stormy sea that is new world order. ■

Anand Sharma,  
President & CEO  
TBM Consulting Group, Inc.  
asharma@tbmcg.com