

Look Before You Lean: How a Lean Transformation Goes Bad--A Cautionary Tale

By Employee X

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There’s a lot of pain going down in American business these days, and much of it is coming down on the heads of American workers. Surprisingly much of it is caused by corporate witlessness rather than wickedness. Look Before You Lean: How a Lean Transformation Goes Bad--A Cautionary Tale chronicles two years of lean-driven turbulence at the author’s employer of 15 years. Lean, the management methodology which started in the 1950s in the manufacturing environment of Toyota, has slowly but surely been making its way into the office environments of the Western world. But not without controversy. The book pivots off the question of why lean thrives when it appears to turn people off almost as quickly as it turns them on. Beyond that, it is a statement from what lean practitioners call “the factory floor,” where the view is not as simple, sunny, or salutary as it may appear from the boardrooms, executive suites, or various lean think tanks. It is that most critical assembly line statement that lean advocates themselves give loud, long lip service to. It is this: Stop the line! There’s something wrong here.

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Editorial Review

About the Author
Employee X has been a writer and editor in corporate America for most of his professional life. He worked for a Fortune 500 company where the long-whispered rumor in the corridors was that the company had once hired an arsonist to torch the hotel where their chief competitors were holding a conference, sending all its upper management up in smoke. He worked for another company where the founder and president was shot and paralyzed outside the courthouse where he was on trial for pornography. And then there was the company where one of the in-house mad scientists took an experimental laser ray up to a hillside overlooking a major metropolitan area to conduct an unauthorized, unsupervised, unbelievable field test. Yet for all that, Employee X doesn't think he's ever quite seen anything like a company at the top of its industry with a 22 kt. gold reputation turning the keys of its kingdom over to a cadre of consultants from an outside consultancy firm to conduct a "lean transformation." You had to see it to believe it. Employee X saw it, and here he chronicles much of what happened before his disbelieving eyes.

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