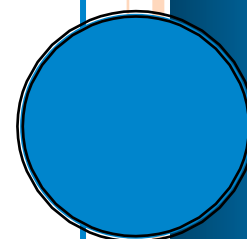


## ***Leadership Move Three: Eliminate Fear and Comfort***

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## **Leadership Move Three: Eliminate Fear and Comfort**

A lean culture requires action, experimentation and new thinking. These transformational activities inevitably involve some level of risk. The culture at many organizations — even those that are considered innovative and risk-takers to the business community — are risk-averse internally. Since lean is best learned by doing, a lean leader must create the right environment to encourage and support experimentation. The fear associated with such activities must be eliminated, as well as the comfort that exists in maintaining the status quo.

### **Leaving the Comfort Zone**

Individual and collective learning only occurs when people step out of their comfort zones — the set of conditions and activities with which they are familiar and under which they know how to operate. Comfort zones provide people with safe havens from all of the changes about which they think they have no control. A lean leader must eliminate the comfort zone and direct people to the learning zone.

For people to learn, they must step outside the bounds of what they currently know. They must change the conditions and rules under which they operate. This does not mean chaos and unorganized change. Stepping out of the comfort zone should be purposeful, continuous and varied. The leader must force people out of the comfort zone by setting clear goals and providing the vehicle to guarantee success. It is not simply about setting higher targets — it is requiring individuals and organizations to experiment purposefully.

Every operational review, coaching session and conversation must be used to coax, prod and push people out of their comfort zones. If a leader asks an employee every day about the experiments he or she has performed toward improvement, the employee will eventually have to conduct some experiments to answer the questions.

A lean leader must anticipate and expect to encounter naysayers along the way, people that drag their feet, a healthy dose of pushback, and ultimately deal with those individuals who will not go along.

### **Encourage Experimentation**

In addition to eliminating the comfort zone, the lean leader must eliminate fear. If people step too far outside of their comfort zones, they enter fear zones. For example, a person who brings forward a new idea in a staff meeting and is immediately ridiculed will think twice before speaking out again. A lean leader must squelch such criticism and provide emotional safety. Attacks often come in subtle, passive-aggressive forms, but the leader must address them head-on. If an individual is punished for trying something new that fails, everyone will get the message that failure should be avoided at all costs — even at the expense of not improving.

### **Model the Desired Behavior**

Another way a lean leader can eliminate fear and move people out of their comfort zones is to model the desired behavior. Many leaders model “knower” behavior instead of “learner” behavior. They create false impressions that they know nearly everything. Knower leaders hide gaps in their knowledge, as they consider them signs of weakness. People see through this. They have much greater respect for a leader with integrity, someone who knows his or her limits and is willing to become vulnerable by moving out of the comfort zone. When a leader demonstrates the “knower” persona, everyone copies that behavior as a path for promotion. Learner leaders, on the other hand, acknowledge their failures and publicly learn from them. This often throws people off when it happens, because most people do not expose their failures, instead hoping that nobody notices.

Building creative tension is not a one-time, organization-wide event. It is an everyday behavior. It is not based on slogans or posters, but on dialogue and coaching. Leadership has the responsibility to build genuine tension, not to fake crises or impart veiled threats.

## **A New Way of Thinking**

I have heard several people say recently that once they began thinking and looking at their work through the lenses of lean, that it was hard to think and operate any other way. I personally have enjoyed learning about lean and applying the principles and concepts to security operations.

Admittedly, applying lean in a service environment is much harder than in a manufacturing environment. Service processes, which are cross-functional by their very nature, can be difficult to see, and documentation and measurement are sparse. However, the results can be astounding.

Eliminating waste, adding value, identifying, documenting and mapping key processes, creating a work area that's free of clutter and safety hazards, and mistake proofing a task, are just a few of the lean tools that would help any function or organization operate better.

If you would like to contribute your insights or suggestions, please email them to me at [Derrick\\_Wright@Baxter.Com](mailto:Derrick_Wright@Baxter.Com)

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