

Q&A

with lean leader
and new AME board
member Dick Ryan

SUCCESSFULLY MERGING LEAN AND

PEOPLE-CENTRIC LEADERSHIP

BY BRIAN WELLINGHOFF



Dick Ryan has led the lean journey for nearly 30 years — beginning at Wiremold, continuing through a number of consulting endeavors and now as Barry-Wehmiller’s lean journey leader for the last decade. AME is proud to welcome Dick as a new board member and to share his thoughts on what it takes to successfully undertake a lean journey.

Q *You’ve been a pioneer in the manufacturing lean journey. Where did that journey begin?*

A I will never forget the day that Art Byrne became the new CEO at Wiremold, and he immediately sat down with the leadership team. He told us we were embarking on a lean journey and then personally provided three days of intensive lean training.

Q *As you dug deeper into lean, was it a “shock to the system?”*

A We were shocked but intrigued. As a leadership team, we knew of Deming but did not connect his system with the lean principles Art was introducing. Within a few weeks, as the sales leader, I was in a kaizen event in manufacturing. I had rarely been in manufacturing. The shock was, “What am I doing on the floor? I’m a sales guy.” I will never forget, in one event, we wanted to move a piece of manufacturing equipment but there was a clearance issue with one of the walls. I told our sensei, and he looked right back at me and said, “Then move the wall.” Within 48 hours, we opened the wall, moved the machine and had the new process running.

Q *What wisdom did you take from that experience at Wiremold?*

A Number one was a bias for action. Just as I learned in that event, we have to be willing to change long-standing practices in our businesses, and without requiring months of analytical research. And you can build a culture that embraces bias for action if you have strong leaders who are actively engaged in the business

and who actively participate in improvement activities.

Q *How has your perspective of the lean journey developed over the years?*

A My evolution has been in the people-centric leadership (PCL) side. Many lean leaders have to evolve to see that you can apply lean tools to any situation — in manufacturing, sales, administration, finance, engineering and other areas. But the biggest paradigm shift is realizing the power of aligning a vision of people-centric leadership with the power of lean thinking. I used to be more command and control, and I have evolved into a balanced leader who blends PCL and lean tools. And, I will tell you, nothing has been more personally fulfilling.

Q *Did this thinking evolve through your engagement with Barry-Wehmiller?*

A The penny dropped for me when I had been with Barry-Wehmiller for six months at a kaizen report-out in our Baltimore facility. This was one of our CEO, Bob Chapman’s first report-outs, and I was standing right next to him as the first two speakers shared the traditional background and potential savings. Bob interrupted the third speaker and asked, “How did it make you feel?” I had never heard that before. The man paused for a moment and his voice cracked as he shared, “I feel



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better. I feel a part of the team more than I ever have before. People are listening to me, and I can already see the difference.” Before the report-out ended, everyone shared how the event had made them feel, and all of their thoughtful comments were incredible.

Now Barry-Wehmiller has an internal university and BW Leadership Institute to train and teach other organizations how to bring their lean programs into balance with simple, people-centric activities.

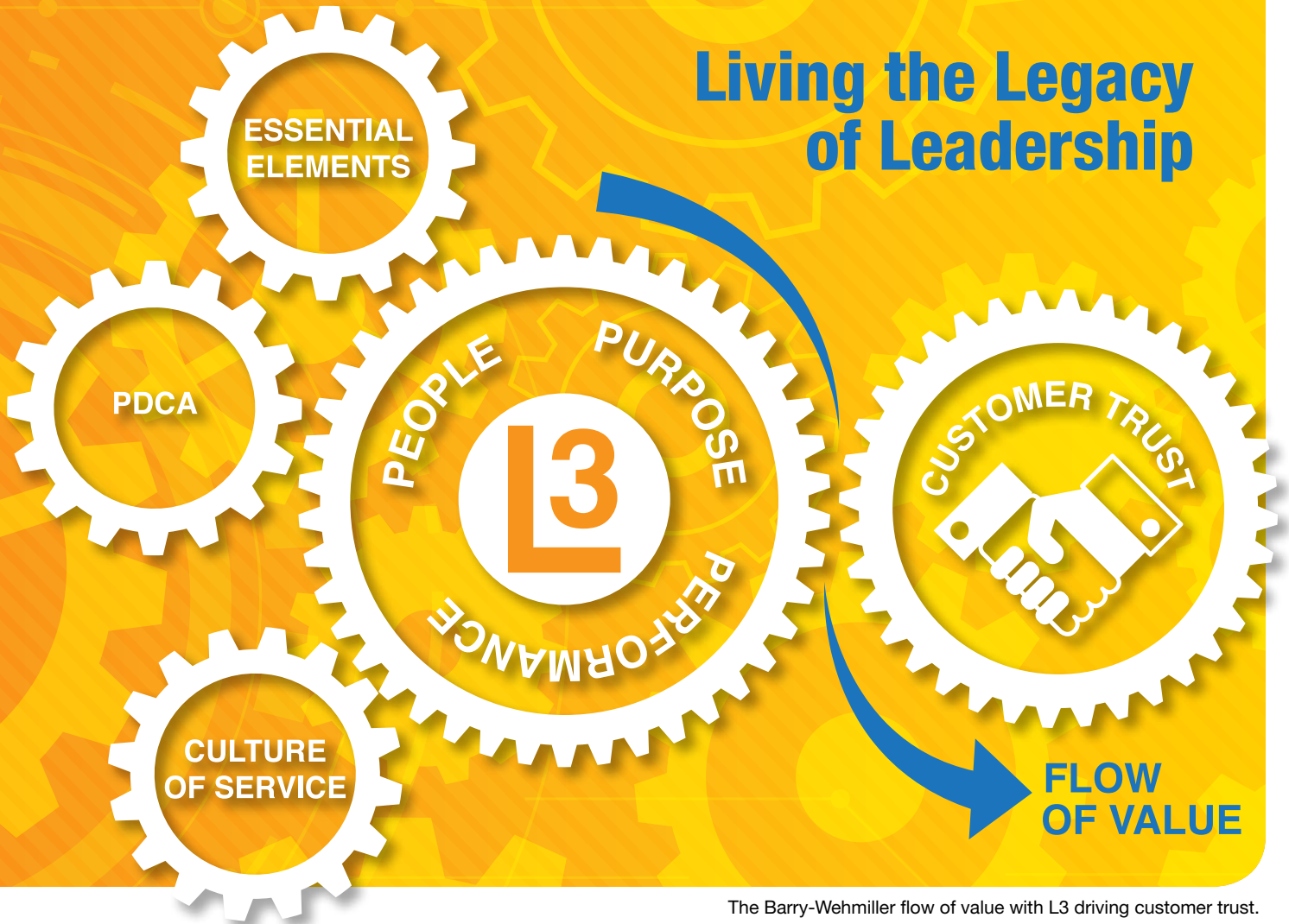
Q *More recently, Barry-Wehmiller has coupled its lean journey with a customer trust initiative, designed to enhance the customer experience and optimize the value they receive by a strengthening the two-way trust that is the hallmark of any successful relationship. What does this mean at Barry-Wehmiller?*

A One of the fundamental principles of lean has always involved bringing value to customers. The

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Living the Legacy of Leadership



The Barry-Wehmiller flow of value with L3 driving customer trust.



Dick Ryan reviews team process work at the AME CEO Summit.

customer must be a beneficiary of the byproducts of our lean activities, alongside our people and our business. Our vision for customer trust has brought new focus and allowed us to expand our commitment to PCL while bringing customer impact closer to everyone in the organization. It has been exciting to see the senior leaders in our organization challenge all team members with a heightened sense of urgency.

Q *What are you most proud of achieving at Barry-Wehmiller?*

A We are not perfect and always have things to improve, but when I look back and consider the opportunity I had to coach and guide people toward aligning PCL and application of lean tools to continuous improvement, it makes me extremely proud. I hope that every lean leader gets to experience the joy of not just improving a process, but developing people.

Q *What advice would you give to lean novices who are looking to develop their skills?*

A Go to work for a company that is really practicing lean, and by that I mean both PCL and tool application, like at Barry-Wehmiller. Few companies are truly that far on the journey, so if you must, start somewhere with tools and develop your PCL skills outside your organization. But if you can find an organization that does both, sacrifice to be part of it.

Q *How do organizations like AME fit into the system that allows lean to flourish?*

A We really have great leadership in AME. George Saiz, who comes from a lean, people-centric company, knows firsthand how companies need both to be successful. AME connects people and allows benchmarking that leads to real business improvements. However, I am especially proud to be joining the board at a time when AME can play a unique role in connecting people to more opportunities to develop their people-centric leadership. Whether it is at the international conference or through more diversified regional offerings, AME is at the leading edge of bringing PCL coupled with enterprise excellence to life in more organizations.

Q *Bottom line, what can organizations focus on to be more successful?*

A You have to have the senior leadership team set simple, quantifiable goals. The first step is to measure against those goals with appropriate strategies to achieve them, and while there are so many measures out there, the two most important are on-time shipment and inventory turns. If you deliver when the customer wants and you have high turns, that means that all the supporting processes must be functioning well. Second, you have to excel in two core strategies: step

change Hoshin projects and daily continuous improvement organized in a simple lean roadmap. If you have those components and couple them with PCL, you are well on your way toward becoming a great organization. ●

Brian Wellinghoff is director of the L3 journey for Barry-Wehmiller.

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A team at Barry-Wehmiller attends a kaizen event.



Key team members are selected by peers to drive a luxury car for a week of recognition.