This is good book to buy and give to managers who don’t get it ... whether they are your reports, your peers, or your boss. It’s a quick read aimed especially at those who need to understand the power of the lean transformation process and the depth of mindset change required. The main focus is the Toyota Production System (TPS) as seen through the eyes of the plant manager of a failing automobile plant in New Jersey. The plant manager, Tom Papas, is in dire straits and has been told his plant has less than a year to work itself off the "Plants To Be Closed" list of the fictional auto company, Taylor Motors.

Much like The Goal by Eli Goldratt, the book involves the reader in the plant manager’s personal life including his Greek heritage and parents in Queens, his divorced wife, his two daughters, his musical attachment to rhythm and blues, and his new girlfriend. This helps make Tom into everyman and adds some depth and understanding of his character.

But to be sure, the main focus is Tom’s openness to learn from a retired lean sensei from Toyota, Andy Seito. The whole process of tracking down the sensei and convincing him to take on the New Jersey plant as a project is covered in detail. Needless to say, Andy proves to be wise and sees much opportunity for improvement — an understatement! The lean transformation story starts with a walk through the plant, starting with the raw material and ending with the completed Desperado muscle car, Andy beginning to teach, and Tom learning to be a sensei himself.

Most of the lean tools are covered, but in the sense of seeing a need or barrier and then prescribing a tool to fit the need. Use of tools such as leveling flow, line balancing, Kaizens, kanbans, 5 Why analysis, 5 Ss, and reduction of waste are all covered in the story. Some lesser known tools like daily process reviews, learning organizations, videos, Four Ms, and Fukuda’s parable are also discussed and explained. Also emphasized is understanding the current process and developing a vision or standard. “How can one manage without a standard?” is asked numerous times.

Just to add tension and spice, Tom’s body shop manager not only does not believe in TPS, but is politically connected to the corporate CFO who rules with an iron hand and is married to the great granddaughter of the founder, Alfred Taylor.

As the story continues, Tom and Andy form a trusting and beneficial relationship, the shops of the factory begin improving by gaining union involvement, reducing waste and challenging people to take owner-
ship. As we all say, it is a long journey and the story shows the twists and turns, and the massive effort required to really change an organization's culture through a lean transformation.

Reviewed by Bill Baker, retired knowledge management and benchmarking champion, Raytheon Company. He is a member of the AME Southwest Regional Board, served as program chairman of the 2002 AME Annual Conference in Chicago, and was a presenter at the 2003 AME Annual conference in Toronto. He is the conference chairman for the AME 2005 Annual Conference in Boston and is a member of the Target editorial board. His experience includes more than 20 years of manufacturing management in space systems, missiles, and night vision equipment prior to focusing on benchmarking and knowledge management for the past ten years.

Shingo Prize Recipients – Congrats to All!

The most recent (2004) Shingo Prize (co-sponsored by the Association for Manufacturing Excellence — AME) recipients have been announced. Receiving awards for manufacturing excellence were: Autoliv, Inc., Tremonton, UT; BAE Systems, Platform Solutions, Fort Wayne, IN; Boeing Company, Mesa, AZ; Boeing Company, St. Charles, MO; Boston Scientific Corporation, Maple Grove, MN; Celestica de Monterrey, S.A. de C.V., Apodaca, Nuevo Leon, Mexico; Delphi, Automotive Molding Operations, Warren, OH; Delphi, Plant 39, Saltillo Operations, Ramos Arizpe, Coah, Mexico; Delphi, Plant 84 Guadalupe II, Guadalupe, Mexico; GDX Automotive, New Haven, MO; Hearth & Home Technologies, Lake City, MN; Lockheed Martin, Archbald, PA; Takata Seatbelts, Inc., Agua Prieta, Douglas, AZ; Takata Seatbelts, Inc., Monterrey Plant 1, Apodaca, Nuevo Leon, Mexico; and Takata Seatbelts, Inc., Monterrey Plant 2, Apodaca, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. Congratulations to all of the winners!

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