



# 75 Thoughts on Growth, Lean, and Leadership

*By Damon Baker*

*Below is a compiled list of all of my thoughts and quotes posted on LinkedIn from 2017. The natural themes that emerged were Growth, Lean, and Leadership. My hope is that these thoughts inspire you in some way to take positive action in your chosen direction in the year ahead. Thank you for all your kind words and support, and I hope you enjoy!*

- 1. Relative to size, the human tongue is the strongest muscle in the body, yet it is far too often the last one thought about when it comes to resolving conflict.*
- 2. No amount of kaizens can solve a problem that's rooted in the leadership or lack of it.*
- 3. You are either moving through the crowd or the crowd is moving through you.*
- 4. Labeling someone that leaves a company "Non-regrettable" is basically the same as making a mistake and saying "I meant to do that". Both sound equally ridiculous.*

5. *What treadmill are you running on that you “can’t” or “refuse” to get off of?*
6. *Displaying something on a wall does not imply we are “doing lean” or somehow managing more effectively.*
7. *An organization’s core values are their closely held beliefs that should be demonstrated in all interactions both internal and external, and not just when it is convenient or financially beneficial to do so. In fact, the message sent to the organization is most powerful when they are demonstrated at the most inconvenient time, or in the least self-serving situations. These are the actions that etch our memories and what differentiates great companies and leaders alike.*
8. *Right now, someone, somewhere, is more hungry, more determined, requiring less sleep, and more willing to fail than you are because they refuse to believe that B.S. story we all tell ourselves that “it’s not possible.”*
9. *When was the last time you acknowledged your failures as a leader to your team? Humility makes you human and “perfection” is a myth.*
10. *Do not underestimate the power of who does what by when.*
11. *Do not deny yourself the right to grow and be better.*
12. *You cannot fix what you cannot face.*
13. *The gemba is a mirror...it does not lie, complain, or make excuses. It simply reflects the quality of leadership afforded to it.*
14. *Two simple, yet powerful questions you should ask your customers today: 1. Why did you choose us? 2. Why do you continue to choose us?*
15. *To truly be an effective problem solver, one must remain solution agnostic and not seek the first person that agrees with their hypothesis, but actually strive to disprove it.*
16. *Great quote from a terrific leader I heard this week, “We are going to build a Problem Solving Culture in our organization and it is not optional. Those of you who believe you can outlast me and are thinking...this too shall pass, I am forewarning you. If you are not in the boat rowing the same direction, I do not need you on this team.” Leading by example!*
17. *Combining multiple perspectives enhances the quality of your decision making...the effect of the wisdom of crowds.*
18. *Knowingly or unknowingly we all campaign against the ideas we reject, thus eliminating the potential to reach a mutual compromise.*
19. *Our cognitive biases leave us prone to the mistaken belief that our narratives and reality are somehow one and the same.*
20. *When organizations show greater concern for profit, rather than for customers and employees, why are they surprised by the lack of loyalty bestowed upon them?*

21. *The fastest way for leadership to destroy its credibility is to say employees come first and then be seen as putting them last.*
22. *Encouraging Yourself - Incorporating new approaches or behaviors into your life (or not) often depends on how you talk to yourself about them.*
23. *You cannot hold people accountable for something they have not agreed to.*
24. *The aim of a leader should be to advocate for fairness, honesty, and consensus rather than for a particular person, point-of-view, or solution.*
25. *Get clear about your current reality, envision the future you want to create for yourself, look honestly at "what's in the way", and craft the strategic and tactical path to get you there.*
26. *Executing strategy is quite simply about consistently taking the critical few actions that advance you towards your envisioned future.*
27. *What closely held beliefs are you imprisoning your better version of yourself with?*
28. *People will try to talk you out of it before you've ever begun...ignore them and follow your passion.*
29. *Creating transparency in an organization is cathartic.*
30. *The speed by which things get done is directly proportional to the level of TRUST afforded to the people driving it.*
31. *Benchmarking best practices comes with a word of caution...In order for improvements to be sustainable, an organization must not only adopt the new way of working, but more importantly adopt a new way of thinking.*
32. *Culture is the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an organization.*
33. *Imagine what music would sound like if we incentivized the individual members of an orchestra to play faster and louder than each other...now imagine the effect this type of thinking has on organizations.*
34. *How many people do you employ in the "information factory" versus the "real factory"?*
35. *The means are the ends in the making...*
36. *How many things are you doing daily that you never question the value of?*
37. *I was asked this question the other day by a client..."Damon, if you could have only 2 tools from the lean toolbox to do your job the rest of your career, which ones would you pick?" To which I responded... 1. An open mind AND 2. A willingness to try*
38. *Create Followership - Try this for a day...take out a piece of paper, draw a line down the center, write "me" on the left side, and "others" on the right side. Throughout the day, record on the "me" side, what thoughts and actions you initiate that focus on advancing your own agenda. On*

*the right side, "others", record the thoughts and actions you initiate to help others pursue theirs. How balanced is your list?*

- 39. You are not your performance appraisal, a rating, a number, the problem, somebody else's conclusion, a name on a list, or an outcast. You and only you define your self-worth, and you can manifest your own destiny. How will you "start doing" today?*
- 40. Having no problems is THE problem.*
- 41. Does your company: Measure metrics that tell a good story and hide problems? OR Create transparency in the metrics and solve real problems?*
- 42. Transformation starts by creating a true picture of reality.*
- 43. What percentage of your to do list is aligned with your company's strategic plans?*
- 44. Lean transformation requires innovative thinking...So are you a right brain, left brain, or equal brain thinker?*
- 45. I don't have the time = I don't have the desire*
- 46. Professional athletes all have one thing in common...They've reached the pinnacle of their sport, yet they still need a coach to continue to get better at what they do. Are you a professional at what you do? Who do you call on to be your coach?*
- 47. End "Groundhog Day" and try this simple, overlooked secret to making your meetings more effective...ACCOUNTABILITY. Make sure to document the specific actions your team will take as a result of the meeting (who, what, and when) and share them with the team. Your role as a leader is to be relentless about following up! Too many meetings get held without a clear call to action, and as a result, teams keep having the same conversations over and over, without generating results.*
- 48. Are you an "either/or" leader or a "both/and" leader? "Either/or" leaders tend to have a "fixed" mindset when considering the full set of options available to them, and make unnecessary trade offs. "Both/and" leaders have a "growth" mindset, and relish new challenges, opportunities, and innovation. How do you demonstrate your "and/or" thinking?*
- 49. How much time and money of your sales and marketing resources is aimed at retaining your existing customers? If the answer is like so many others...guess who IS spending their time and money with them?*
- 50. Each day we are given the unique opportunity to inspire others to exceed their own expectations. Whose growth will you elevate today?*
- 51. Great leaders inspire winning, trying, failing, learning and laughing together.*
- 52. To lead, you have to get out of your own way.*
- 53. The power of saying a simple thank you is often overlooked. What if this week, you started a ritual of thanking 3 customers personally for their business? Tell them how their support helps*

*your organization achieve its mission. Customers have a choice and they chose you. Tell them thank you for making that choice, and that you'll be there to support their needs in the future.*

54. *Any [fill in the blank] Business System that does not take into full consideration people, principles, systems, and tools together as a holistic business strategy, is destined for failure.*
55. *One of the reasons "lean" fails is that organizations convince themselves that such metrics as: the number of kaizens performed, the number of black belts certified, or scores on lean assessments are the key measures of success. How do your shareholders measure performance? Align the two.*
56. *Lean Leadership : A Lean Leader cannot outsource their responsibilities in driving a sustainable lean transformation. Implementing lean for real results is hard, roll up your sleeves kind of work.*
57. *You can tie the exact moment in time a company starts losing to the competition to when associates started removing themselves from any sense of shared responsibility.*
58. *The lean journey is tough and fraught with obstacles and dead ends. If you ever feel like giving up, just remember why you started.*
59. *Everybody is all for change until it's their turn. What role in the change required are you failing to recognize that you own?*
60. *Said very often... "we tried lean here and it didn't work." ...Said almost never... "as a leader I failed to champion it"*
61. *Said very often... "We do not have enough resources." ...Said almost never... "We are analyzing our work to see where we have opportunity to eliminate waste."*
62. *Said very often... "We do not have time to do lean." ...Said almost never... "We must start doing lean and re-prioritizing our focus."*
63. *Raise your hand if you like your own ideas? Assuming you do, should we really be surprised when people pursue their own ideas, without first seeking consensus and alignment?*
64. *Have you ever noticed how much optimism and procrastination have in common? Everything is going to get better, just wait...I can feel it.*
65. *Leaders - Is it on your calendar monthly to have a development conversation with your direct reports? What's on the agenda? What goals and objectives have been agreed to? What new challenging assignments have been issued? What's the status? What strengths can be leveraged? What weaknesses can be improved? What competencies are needed by the organization? Do you know what they want out of their career and are you enabling their aspirations? How will you measure and reward their success? Great leaders forge new leaders in the crucible of stretch assignments.*
66. *When a team is under-performing, there is no point in blaming the people in it. One must always look to the ability of the leader.*
67. *Complexity is the enemy of getting results.*

68. *Indecisiveness shares a cozy bed with a lack of confidence*
69. *When a new employee is hired into a company, a manager and a team of interviewers reached consensus that they were hiring the best candidate. What caused managers to lose confidence in their abilities later on? What went wrong? The hiring process, the manager, or both?*
70. *As you make your way through the office today, have a quick look around at the various departments? How can you tell if they are winning or losing? Is it clear how their work is supporting the goals of the company?*
71. *Never spike the football on the one yard line...*
72. *I am curious. Where does one go to get a "Lean Master, Expert, Guru, or Sensei" designation? Is the person conferring this title even higher in status? Perhaps "Lean Creator"?*
73. *Employee engagement is an outcome based metric, just like revenue is the output of a selling process. It's the final score of how employees feel and think about their employment journey through your business, and it happens to reflect summation of all their experiences, both good and bad along the way. What are you doing to understand the key process levers that need fixing in your engagement equation?*
74. *The defining factor of your success is not a lack of resources, but a lack of resourcefulness.*
75. *The outward appearance of a workplace is a direct reflection of the inner thinking of its employees.*

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### BACKGROUND

Damon is the President & CEO of Lean Focus. For over 25 years, he has been implementing lean in consulting, operations, continuous improvement, and GM & VP-level leadership roles for such companies as Danaher, HNI, Eaton, Argo Consulting, Experian, and Winegard.

Trained by disciples of the Toyota Production System, he worked in a Shingo Prize winning facility and is a Shingo Prize Examiner. Over his career he has demonstrated hands-on leadership and facilitation of 500+ kaizen events for 50 major corporations in 16 different countries. Damon led the North American Danaher Business System Office. While at Danaher, one of his mentored operating companies was nominated Most Improved Plant, and one of his factories won Best Plant Worldwide 2 years in a row. Damon holds an MBA from St. Ambrose University and a Bachelors of Arts in Management and Marketing from Iowa Wesleyan University.

### INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

Aerospace and Defense, Automotive, Electronics, Capital Equipment, Chemicals, Protective Packaging, Residential Construction Materials, Water Quality, Dental, Test & Measurement, Sheet Metal Fabrication, Life Sciences, Medical Devices, Discrete Assembly, Oil and Gas.

### LEAN EXPERIENCE

Building/Installing Problem Solving & Kaizen Cultures, Operational Due Diligence, Acquisition Integration, Strategic Planning & Policy Deployment, Sales Force Efficiency & Effectiveness Tools, Pricing Margin Analysis, Transactional Kaizen, EBITDA focused operational improvements, Cellular Manufacturing, 6S & Visual Management, Standardized Work, Mistake Proofing (Poka Yoke), Visual Controls, Setup Reduction (SMED), Total Productive Maintenance (TPM), Daily Management Processes, Leader Standard Work, Working Capital reduction via Kanban & Pull Based Inventory tools, DSO Reduction, and Accounts Payable processes, Value Analysis & Engineering, 3P, Accelerated Product Development Tools.

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