

LEADERSHIP LEARNING GUIDE / EPISODE 8

The Kiss of Death in a Lean Environment

Topic: Trust, respect for people and continuous improvement
Audience: Leadership, management and operations courses

ABOUT THE EPISODE

Kaizen events freed up employee time and floor space. Rather than lay off the people whose assignments were no longer needed, leadership retained them, arranged cross-training in other departments, and challenged Business Development to bring in more work. Pete contrasts this approach with the loss of trust when employees are laid off because of an improvement.

Improve the work. Develop the people. Protect the trust.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After watching, students should be able to:
• Explain why layoffs tied to Kaizen can undermine future participation.
• Describe how cross-training develops people and protects organizational knowledge.
• Identify ways to use freed capacity for growth and other valuable work.
• Propose a clear plan for employees whose time an improvement frees up.

FOUR PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

1. **Plan for people first.** Decide how freed employee time will be used before the event.
2. **Develop the workforce.** Use cross-training to build skills and flexibility.
3. **Turn capacity into opportunity.** Connect available time and space with growth.
4. **Make respect visible.** Explain the plan and demonstrate it through your actions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why might employees withhold ideas after a colleague is laid off following Kaizen?
2. What value did retaining and cross-training employees preserve for the company?
3. What did the message to Business Development communicate to the workforce?
4. How could a short-term labor saving weaken improvement over the longer term?
5. What should leaders explain about freed capacity before asking for participation?

FIVE-MINUTE CLASSROOM ACTIVITY / PLAN FOR FREED CAPACITY

In pairs, imagine an improvement frees 20 staff-hours per week. Propose two useful ways to redeploy that time, identify any training needed, and write a two-sentence explanation for employees. Choose one observable action that would show leadership is following through.

KEY TAKEAWAY

People are more likely to contribute when they can see that improvement supports their development. A leader's response to freed capacity shapes whether the next improvement effort earns trust or creates fear.

A GOOD LEADER'S ACTIONS PROVE THAT PEOPLE MATTER.

WATCH EPISODE 8

https://youtu.be/kqghCjT3Ojs

Scan the code to watch on YouTube.



Explore the principles behind this case in
The Lean Leader's Playbook.
Learn how leadership choices protect trust and support improvement.

Buy on Amazon: https://amzn.to/4h29dpu
As an Amazon Associate I earn from qualifying purchases.