

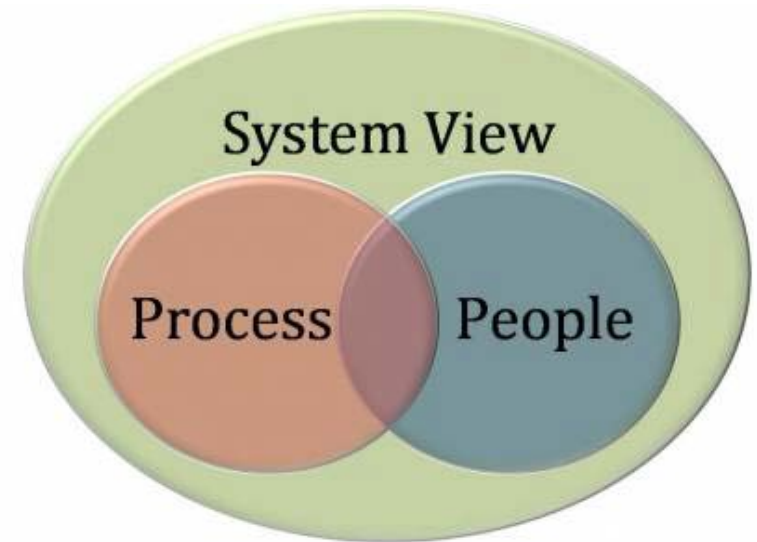
Process Improvements

Guest was Glenn Whitfield
Director of Process Improvement Services
at Dean Dorton Ford



**Business901 Podcast
Transcript**

Glenn Whitfield serves as Director of [Dean Dorton Ford](#)'s Process Improvement Services group based out of the Louisville office. Glenn was my guest on the [Business901](#) Podcast and we had the opportunity to discuss DDF's methodology for improvement within an organization. Their methodology concentrates on a Value stream Analysis to determine their clients individual needs. It was a discussion around practical hands on implementation and the role middle managers play.



Glenn has over twenty years of professional experience, he has managed and assisted organizations through a variety of improvement strategies and tactics, ranging from organization-wide Performance Improvement efforts to facilitation of Value Stream Mapping or Kaizen events. A Six Sigma Black Belt, he utilizes tools and methodologies from Lean, Six Sigma, Theory of Constraints, and traditional process improvement techniques to improve operations. Glenn also authors the [Process Improvement](#) Blog.

How Dean Dorton Ford Can Help

The Process Improvement Team at DDF has developed a comprehensive methodology to identify opportunities for improvement within an organization. This approach can be applied strategically or tactically depending on your current needs. We will work with you to help determine which the appropriate level and which areas we can help based on your individual needs.

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Joe Dager: Thanks everyone for joining us, this is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901Podcast. Participating in the program today is Glenn Whitfield, and he is the director of process improvement services at Dean Dorton Ford. Glenn would you go ahead and explain who Dean Dorton Ford is and your role there?

Glenn Whitfield: Dean Dorton Ford is a full service accounting and business consulting firm located in Kentucky, where we provide services to clients in sizes, all sizes in a variety of industries; healthcare, insurance marketing and manufacturing. We've recently started up a Process Improvement Group and Service offering, which I'm leading up, just in the past month. This enables us to provide another service to our clients, kind of unique for an organization of our size. You have the big four that have been providing consulting for years and process improvement. We're trying to offer to more of a mid-size client the opportunity to give them better value and help them improve profits and throughput.

Joe: What caused Dean Dorton Ford to make this step?

Glenn: I think when they looked at the landscape out there and especially in healthcare. Our healthcare consulting practice has grown tremendously in the past several years, and as you're probably aware there's a big push in healthcare for a Lean and Lean Sigma application, whether it's in physician practices or healthcare providers or even in the insurance services. I think the team here realized that there's an opportunity with some, not necessarily your large health systems because most, many of them are already are doing that. However, some of your mid-market, mid-tier, maybe even a few stand alone hospitals out there that could use these services but can't really afford the go out and hire a full time Six Sigma Black Belt or process improvement performance improvement type team. So what we're doing is being able to offer that service to them in a way that's affordable and gets them value.

Joe: One thing you mentioned there and I'm just kind of inquisitive is, because I hear it sometimes, now you mentioned Lean Six Sigma then you mentioned Lean Sigma, is there a difference there?

Glenn: In my mind, I guess you could say there is. I mean there's Lean which you know is based on the Toyota production system and the principles that Womack and the book Lean Thinking, The Machine that changed the World, there's that as standalone and then Six Sigma, which is made famous by Motorola and GE, which is about reducing variation and that's its own. So they are separate but then in healthcare there tends to be this combination of the two which has been termed Lean Sigma, and it really- it's just a melding of the two sets of tools that an organization can do and in my experience in most healthcare organizations it's about using Lean. I haven't done a design of experiments in a healthcare organization. Not that it can't be done, but DOE typically isn't there yet. I think with healthcare some might say that there's so much low hanging fruit that to go into the detail of a full fledged Six Sigma project is really not necessary in a lot of cases because there's so much improvement that can be made just by implement a level of the principles of Lean.

Joe: Your improvement service, what is the value stream analysis you conduct when you first go into an organization?

Glenn: When we first look at an organization, one of the things that I think is very important to define up front and that is often overlooked, is defining the purpose and the value that the organization brings to the customer. It could be a particular process, it could be the organization as a whole, it could be a department or a division but why does this department exist and what value do they provide to the customer? And once that's

identified, and I think it's overlooked if we're going to- I think it's overlooked because many people just take it for granted. Oh well, everyone knows what this department does, it's the obvious' but have you really stepped back and asked why does this exist and what value do you add to the customer instead of making it just an implicit, 'yeah well we all know that'. Let's put it down on a piece of paper and make sure everybody sees it and defines it upfront. And then once we do that we identify the value stream that we want to evaluate and on a large scale that could be 'how does the company go about making money?', 'what is the process in which this organization makes money?' Mapping that at a very strategic high level, or it could be as detailed as how does the order entry process work.

But in doing a value stream analysis my finding is that it's very important to get the people who are actually performing the process in the room. We like to sit with them for three to five days consecutively if possible. Sometimes that's impossible but that's the best case. Where you sit there and you map out the current state, you map out who does what, the information flows and figures out the waste and ideas and areas for an opportunity for improvement. These brainstorming techniques to really draw that out, and I tell people you know, in most brainstorming sessions no idea is a bad idea. I've had several times where you're sitting as a facilitator letting people talk and somebody throws out an idea and a guy goes 'oh that's a real dumb idea', he whispers under his breath. However, then the next day the guy comes back to me and says you know I was thinking about the idea that Fred threw out, and well I don't know if we can do that but what if we did this.

And it gets people thinking and that's what you want out of a brainstorming session are people thinking out of the box, if you will, to use an overused term. In how to do something differently and then from that we develop a future state which is really two levels of a future state, one is kind of an ideal state that's kind of blue sky and what would you do in a perfect world. And then the other is, where do you want to be in six months, a

year from now, what is it, you want this process to look like? So we get- we do the value stream to the value stream analysis, and then we move into what would be just, improve, and you get an action plan, a road map for improvement, that comes out of the VSA. And each person has assignments, and then you just follow up, and that's your improvement, your action plan. And then sustaining that becomes a matter of establishing the proper metrics and management follow up.

My view on metrics is you need to make sure you're establishing the right ones, and I try to look for, "What are you already measuring? What are you already tracking?" And let's try to improve those. You may not be tracking the right metric, but if you are, let's try to improve that instead of creating a hundred different metrics for someone to track.

Yes, they're going to do it for maybe three or four months, but then they're going to stop doing it, because you've just created extra work. I think that's one thing is... consultants and improvement specialists, we don't want to create extra work. We want to just become part of what you're doing, or enhance what they're already doing, or improve what they're already doing.

Joe: The metrics typically are not there, and that's why a lot of times Six Sigma can't be used because Six Sigma thrives on metrics. Do you believe that, is that why you use Lean initially?

Glenn: Yes, and I think the impact...Lean is typically able to make a quick impact. I mean, you can come in and do a Kaizen 5S-type engagement and improve a flow in something relatively quickly. We've done Kaizen events where, Monday you're doing it a certain way, and by Friday, you're doing it a different way, and you've made a 50 percent improvement in the process.

Six Sigma, it's hard to do that, just by the nature of it. It's more project based. They use the DMAIC project, and define is critical. However, the measure takes time. And like you said, the metrics may not exist, so you've got to measure and establish a foundation or a baseline of what the metric is we're tracking.

I think what happens is, Six Sigma projects tend to be drawn out, just by their very nature, and that causes some people to lose maybe interest in it, or think that it's not necessarily applicable, or we don't need to get that quick win, which you can do more in a Lean type or Kaizen-type environment.

I think that kind of hurts maybe some Six Sigma applications; we've got to gather all this information. Maybe we'll have to gather three months of data before we have a good solid foundation, and then if you have seasonality, who knows how long, it would take you to do it?

Joe: One of the things I also hear is that the reason the applications fail is because of, really leadership, and having the right leaders in place on the project. Have you seen that or how do you have that not happen?

Glenn: Leadership is critically important. You've got to get the leadership on board. They're the ones that control the purse strings and funding and set the vision and the direction for the organization. So, they have to be bought off on and sold on, "This is the way we're going to do it."

Also critical is, obviously, the frontline operators, where they're the ones that actually do the work. They have to be bought in that, yes, this is going to make a difference. But a group that I think that is extremely critical, that often gets overlooked, is that middle management group.

And I experienced it myself, where when I was in an organization turning, trying to go into a team based concept. The executives were on board and sold. The frontline operators got trained. They were on board. When it came time to train the middle manager, well the organization...we were pushed against two things.

One, we were running out of money and training, and the other was the launch date was starting for the new product, and they wanted these teams set up. So they just took advantage of the middle managers. Well, middle manager doing what they do is managing people. They fell back into their comfort zone, which was not necessarily the team based theory.

So, they went into what I used to call, "managing with a two-by-four, " and the whole thing kind of eventually unraveled, because, yes, the frontline operators are sitting there trying to do things different, but the middle managers are still trying to manage the way they've always managed.

I think they're critical to the day-to-day success, because the executives aren't looking at it day-to-day. They're going to get a status report. They're going to maybe do a walk through once in a while and see how things are going. It's the day-to-day supervisor, middle management type that has to drive this change and drive the improvements, because they're the ones who are going to free up people to be able to work on special projects.

You know, free up a frontline operator to go do those, or send them to a team meeting somewhere where they can help another group working on a problem, a continuous improvement group or something like that. However, I think they often get overlooked.

Joe: I think you're very, very right there, Glenn, because I find that we always talk about leadership. We always talk about the guy that's doing the job, but the poor middle manager is the guy that sits there and has got to get the thing out the door.

Glenn: Right. And he's sitting there going, "Well, let's see. I've got to get this order out. I'm not going to send my best guy to go help somebody else. I've got to get the order out. No, you can't go to that...I know I told you could last week, but this really came up. This is hot, so you've got to do this."

Well, so now this guy who's supposed to go to the meeting goes, "Well, we're not really committed to this. This is just a bunch of whatever, and they don't care." They, management, don't care. And the senior execs don't...think everything's going great. It just becomes a slow death spiral, if you will. It just starts to slowly unravel, and suddenly it's not working.

Joe: And I think that brings into a question here. When you're looking at a continuous improvement process, can you do it without a structured approach?

Glenn: I don't know that you can. I think you need a structured approach to it. However, there's a difference between a structured approach, and I guess, a non-flexible approach. My approach is I want to be very kind of structured in the way we're going to do it and have guiding principles, if you will.

The one thing about...that makes every organization the same is that every organization is different. They all have different cultures. They all do things differently, even though, on the surface, it may look very similar. The details are often many times different, and then it's the culture that drives that difference.

And I think that's one reason why Toyota says, "Hey, come on in! Look at our plant. See what we do." Knowing that no one could duplicate what they had done exactly, because they have years of a culture built up, and you just can't replicate that overnight.

And I think the concern I have is that people who go in and set up a continuous improvement type mindset, or they want to set up this culture -- they expect it to be done in six months, and they are probably very smart individuals, have read how to do it. They just say "Well you just have to follow these ten steps. You do this exactly like this, and it will work because they did it over at 'XYZ' company. That's what they did it. I read a book about it. That's the way you do it, " and it's not always the way to do it that's for works for 'XYZ' company, and their circumstances, and their industry, and their economic conditions. It maybe not working for 'ABC' company.

I think the overriding philosophy guiding principles are there, but the details are what people get lost in. That's why many times these things fail, because we get caught in wanting to do it, it will. When you do a 57, you do it this way, and well OK when you do a 57 you might do it that way, but you may not do it exactly that way every time. I think that is where the flexibility comes in that you have to be flexible to what the organization has, and what they are willing to accept.

Joe: And do you think that's part of the mapping process that you take someone through, is that you show them what structure they actually have there?

Glenn: I think when you do it, you are taking them through the mapping; you are guiding them through the current state of brainstorming and the future state. So those are apparently overriding where we are going. Now how we get to there and the details that we go through would be different...it might be different from department-to-department.

You have some that the people are very willing to take an active role and want to get into all the details, and they are not.

So, I think what you have to do as a facilitator is you adjust to your audience. It's not that...I am not going to them there. I am going to try to get them all to the same place, but I may have to take a different path for a particular group. I think sometimes as facilitator consultants, we can lose sight of that, because "Well, I just did this last week, and it's ...I ought to be through the current state in six hours and I am not. So these guys just don't get it, "Well that may not be true. It may be that you don't get it as a facilitator." I think that's important. Like I said, the one that everybody is the same is that we are all different, and it's true in organizations too.

Joe: I think that's a great comment because it does show your humility and show your interests in clients because so many times the cop-out is they just don't get it, or we don't have the leadership, we don't have this, and sometimes it is the guy, who has to sit there and redo the way he does things to make it work for this company.

You talked about continuous improvement tools such as Lean, Six Sigma, and Theory of Constraints. How do they interact with each other? Is there a separation, or is it something that you use as a facilitator and combine all of them together?

Glenn: All of them but together, but in kind of a mythological way. My approach is "Let's start off looking at the system in a big picture." Like I said, the purpose and value of defining that, and looking for then what is the constraint holding us back so maybe using some theory constraints thinking systems to find out. Where do we go attack the problem, what is holding the organization back, what is keeping the organization from making more money? The throughput in finding those key levers points constraints if you will.

Once you do that then I think you move down into the organization that's when you can use some of the lean tools, value stream mapping, sort of things. Then as you go in, and you do the value stream analysis, and you come out with this action plan, there may be applications for 5S project. I think the key with the Six Sigma project is it's got to have been a very precise define scope.

One of the big things I will never forget, my master black belt and my training for Six Sigma was making sure you properly define the process, and you don't have scope creep. Do not go solve world hunger with the Six Sigma process, you will never finish. I think that happens a lot, we tend to...organizations on a Six Sigma related project, it's too big. I know he would say some Six Sigma projects are improving the torque variation on the final turn of a screw to put a seat in or the back of a refrigerator if you will. That is a whole Six Sigma project is getting more consistent torque, so they don't loosen overtime. How can you do that without breaking the tip off?

So when you think of a Six Sigma process is that narrow of a scope. I mean it is a screw on the back of a refrigerator if you will. That's a pretty narrowed scoped project. Then you see somebody say "We are going to do a Six Sigma project on a throughput of this plant." I think that is the wrong tool for that sort of scope.

Joe: I just saw the other day, a line that said 80% of Lean Six Sigma projects fail, and the answer to that was "Well, they really probably weren't Lean Six Sigma projects to begin with. They were some overall cultural thing that they thought they were going to solve world hunger with. They never had scope."

Glenn: The define phase in a six sigma project and really in any project, defining your start and end points if you will, is so critically important. People get excited about it when they start, and then they say "Well, we are doing this, let's do this, let's do this, and it just

keeps getting added and added on and added on, and the thing never gets finished, or it never ends.

Joe: Yeah, I love your analogy of screwing the back of a refrigerator because there is nothing wrong with having a Six Sigma project finishing early. We think of a Six Sigma project is that "Oh, it's got to be at least \$100, 000 or its' not worth doing it or there's got to be...a three month, 90, 120-day project, or it may not be worth doing it, " but there is nothing wrong with having a Six Sigma mini project.

Glenn: I think you're right. It is choosing the right tool for the problem that you have in front of you. You have so many tools in your toolbox, choose the right one to solve the problem appropriately. That could be a three week six sigma project. It doesn't have to be like you said "You go to save \$100, 000 this and that." I can solve a problem, maybe it is a quality problem, maybe its customer service." It's the thought process that you are going through. That to me, just following a very logical thought process, kind of the scientific method if you will, of how do you solve a problem?

You identify a problem. You measure it. You find out data about it. You analyze it, and then you put in improvement actions, and then you try to control or sustain it. Some people don't think that way. I guess I do, and that's why I was an engineer and not a political science major, maybe. I don't know.

Joe: When you go into an organization, can they say, "OK, we don't want to have a Lean culture. We don't just want to upset the apple cart, and turn everything and be Toyota, OK? We want to break into the process to do it in chunks. Can we have a separate project over o the side, improve a certain area? Can we do that or is that tough?"

Glenn: I think it can be done. And one of the things that I think we need to be aware of is, going into an organization, and, you know, in some circles, Lean and Six Sigma have very

bad reputations. "Oh, we don't want Six Sigma here, that stuff doesn't work, or you know Lean doesn't work. It won't work in our industry."

Well, OK, we just won't call it Lean, or we won't call it Six Sigma. Let's just call it whatever. However, you can still follow the...it's the methodology and the thought process that you're trying to follow. So, I think you can go into an area and an organization and set up using various methods: Constraints, Lean, and Six Sigma using the tools. You may not call them that, but just do it.

And that's the conversation I had with a CEO one time. I said, "I don't care what you call it." But, if what you're trying to do is create a continuous improvement culture...and we can call it whatever, and in fact, I'd prefer you don't call it anything.

Because then it becomes some flavor of the month, or whatever. It just becomes naturally the way you start to do things, and that's when you know that you've really gotten there, if you will, is when your Lean Sigma program that you've started is no longer a program. It's just the way you do things. It's the way you do business. And that's when you know, "I've truly got it in my culture."

Joe: Now, is there anything you'd like to add in this conversation that you'd like to add?

Glenn: Well, I think that one thing, and this was in my prior employment. I was really kind of focused on what I'd say, IT business alignment, but it's the application of technology and process improvement. One of the things that I've discovered is that a lot of process improvement folks don't realize how technology can really help them.

They set up and set up a new process, but then don't follow it on with a technology that could potentially hardwire the process in a tool like SharePoint Workflow, for example. I know I, from it personally, didn't really understand much about that until about a year ago.

However, the approach to process and technology...the one thing I feel is missing in an organization is, you constantly hear, "Hey, we're going to get this new technology in. And this technology is going to change the way we do things, and everybody's job is going to be easier when we put in what this new technology, whatever System ABC, whatever it is."

You go out and you get ABC, and you put it in and it makes things worse. And I think it made things worse because our tendency has always been to focus on the technology, maybe glance at the process, and ignore the people. And my approach is, "Let's focus on the process." Involve and engage the people when we do that to prepare for technology. It's a matter of fixing the process first and then applying the technology to it. And I think many times organizations forget to do that. They think, "Well, all I have to do is put this technology in, and it's going to change the way we do things." Probably not, people are still going to want to do things the way they've done, and if they haven't been involved in changing the process or getting it ready, preparing it, you're likely to fail.

On the technology side, what do they say, 75 percent of technology products fail to meet expectations? However, we keep trying to put them in the same way. It's like we magically think it'll be better this time. And I think it's because we don't focus on the process.

Joe: I think that's very true, because I think it's just like saying Lean Six Sigma fails 80 percent of the time? It's because you're looking for that magic bullet that you're going to put this in. However, it's hard to install a new software system. It's hard to install a new process, because you've got to change the way you think. But, you also can't be too early to install a new process until you understand how the people think within the organization.

Glenn: Exactly. And you've used the key word; it's hard. It's not easy. It's not this silver bullet that's out there that you can drink the magic potion and "viola" everything's better. Even in the best-case scenario, if you had everybody on board, and you're trying to change, it's going to take you a year. And that's if the executives are walking the floor every day to try to drive change.

One thing I read about change is that we under communicate by a factor of 10. We don't tell people. We don't communicate change and what's going on. And I think that's as important as to how the organization thinks, its culture, and how it embraces change.

With change, you cannot over communicate. I went to a seminar with Eli Goldratt, and his argument is very simple. He says, "People don't resist change." And people would go, "Everybody resists change." Well he asked this lady in the front, "What were the two biggest changes in your life?" And she said, "Well, getting married and having kids." "Did you resist those?" "No, went into them and fully embraced them, went willingly." Because she understood what it was about? She understood what was going to happen. It's a significant change in your life. So, to say people resist change is not entirely true. People resist change that they don't understand, and it's up to management and leadership that the reason why a change is happening is communicated and communicated and communicated. And that's a challenge. It takes a lot of work.

Joe: Great thought to end our conversation on. Thank you, Glenn. If you would like to listen to this podcast, it is available on the iTunes for download.

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What others say:

In the past 20 years, Joe and I have collaborated on many difficult issues. Joe's ability to combine his expertise with "out of the box" thinking is unsurpassed. He has always delivered quickly, cost effectively and with ingenuity. A brilliant mind that is always a pleasure to work with." James R.

Joe Dager is President of Business901, a progressive company providing direction in areas such as Lean Marketing, Product Marketing, Product Launches and Re-Launches. As a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt and a certified coach of the Duct Tape Marketing organization, Business901 provides and implements marketing, project and performance planning methodologies in small businesses. The simplicity of a single flexible model will create clarity for your staff and as a result better execution. My goal is to allow you spend your time on the **need versus the plan**.

An example of how we may work: Business901 could start with a consulting style utilizing an individual from your organization or a virtual assistance that is well versed in our principles. We have **capabilities to plug virtually any marketing function** into your process immediately. As proficiencies develop, Business901 moves into a coach's role supporting the process as needed. The goal of implementing a system is that the processes will become a habit and not an event. Part of your marketing strategy is to learn and implement these tools.

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