# REAL LEAN

## STRATEGIES FOR LEAN MANAGEMENT SUCCESS



## VOLUME FIVE

## BOB EMILIANI

# REAL LEAN

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### Volume Five

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# Appendix II – Lean Writing & Publishing

For over a decade my writing has focused on answering one simple question:

> "What aspects of Lean management do managers
> not understand?"

In answering that question [1], I purposely sought to add originality to Lean thinking and practice that has been lacking, while at the same time making sure that what I develop is simple, easy to understand, easy to remember, and easy to put into practice. Most books on Lean management report what Toyota does, and the authors offer little in the way of their own original and creative inputs. While these books can be very valuable, most do not concisely capture critical information that executives need.

In addition, the processes of writing and publishing are batch-and-queue and thus in great need of improvement. We know from experience with Lean management that its principles and practices apply to just about every business, but does it apply to writing and book publishing? Of course it does. While I have made efforts to improve my writing and publishing processes, they do remain mainly batch-and-queue – though it has been lightly hybridized with Lean principles and some Lean practices. I have not been able to do better than that so far.

How do Lean principles and practices apply to the process of writing and producing a book? Let's start with the principles. Table 1 summarizes how I apply the two Lean principles, "Continuous Improvement" and "Respect for People," to my

writing and the book production process:

**Table 1**

| Lean Principle | Application to Writing and Publishing |
|---|---|
| Continuous Improvement | • Practice writing, idea generation, or organizing book thoughts and ideas every day.<br>•  Read a wide range of different subject matter daily.<br>• Proof read more thoroughly, and in different settings (I'm trying a pub lately, the Twin Willows in Narragansett, RI).<br>• Be responsive to reviewer feedback; make changes or edit/re-write to clarify points being made.<br>• Learn from the copy editor, graphic artist, and printer/distributor.<br>• Provide specific and actionable feedback to the copy editor, graphic artist, and printer/distributor.<br>• Use new print-on-demand technology (starting in fall 2002), rather than large run printing + inventorying books. |
| Respect for People | • Respect the reader and other stakeholders; understand their needs and perspectives. Supply practical information; leave theory to others.<br>• Produce products for which there is demand, but sometimes may have to lead the market.<br>• Respect the reader's time; be direct and get to the point.<br>• Keep costs low and value high. Eschew fancy book covers and fancy graphics; produce only paperback editions. Keep things simple.<br>• Price books at low end to extend reach for helping people to better understand and improve their practice of Lean management.<br>• Understand the work requirements of the copy editor, graphic artist, and printer/distributor.<br>• Develop and maintain good relationship with book printer/distributor, and direct customers.<br>• Pay suppliers on-time; sooner is better. |

I do not claim that I do these things perfectly. In some cases, I am in need of substantial improvement. In addition, I am sure I have not yet thought of important things that I should be doing.

David M. Miller pointed out in his review of *REAL LEAN: Understanding the Lean Management System* (Volume One), posted on amazon.com, that I can improve my practice of the "Respect for People," where people in this case are readers. Mr. Miller said:

> "He [Emiliani] approaches his writing in an 'I'm right, you're wrong' type [of] attitude (which is clearly zero-sum thinking)…"

This is a very interesting criticism, one that caused me to think quite a bit about my viewpoint as an author and my style of writing the *REAL LEAN* series of books. My tone can indeed be sharp at times, but the purpose of that is to be clear and not equivocate. Do I have an "I'm right, you're wrong" attitude? It is not a case of "I'm right, you're wrong." My research on the history and evolution of Lean management clearly reveals principles, practices, and ways of thinking that have empirically proved themselves to be better. It is the pioneers who succeeded with progressive management in the real world who are right, not me. The criticism is good and helped me recognize that I need to be more clear on this point.

So how does the book writing process get started? The image below shows the raw material that I begin my writing process with. It is a bunch of ideas that I write down whenever they come to me, day or night, while exercising, practicing my

bass guitar, cooking, cleaning, driving – whenever.
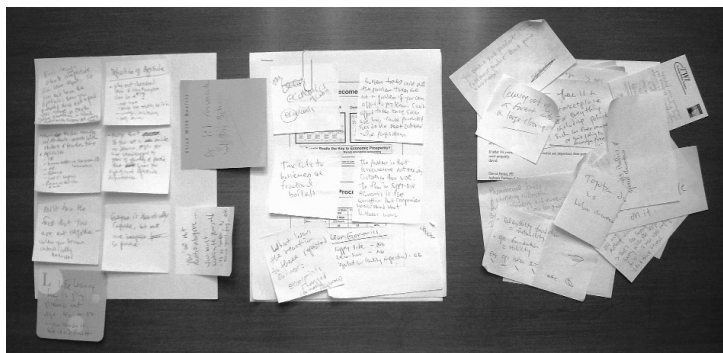


I collect these ideas in a folder, typically, but not always, pertaining to a specific book topic or chapter I hope to write in the future. The ideas are collected for several months. I periodically read each note to judge if it still has merit. I ask myself:

- Is it a useful thought?
- It is profound, original, or creative?
- How can it be improved?
- Does it help explain or clarify something useful?
- Would managers benefit from knowing about this?
- Does it relate to the real world?
- It is specific, practical, or actionable?

I save the good ideas and toss out the bad ideas. I start writing when the ideas begin to gel, which usually occurs suddenly. I get excited and become highly motivated to write. Often I don't really know where to start, so I just get started and within 10 or 20 minutes I know where I am headed. I rarely listen to music when I write, no cigar smoking, and no drinking coffee or booze. I just write – 2 to 5 hours at a sit-

ting, some days for 10 to 12 hours. Writing to me is a bench assembly process, but is also a flow experience (i.e. time flies) that I like very much.

Each idea is transferred into a Microsoft Word file and grouped together according to the thoughts I want to develop. My initial manuscript for each chapter will be 1 or 2 pages long containing a series of disconnected thoughts and sentences. I then develop each one of them and write introductory paragraphs to introduce the topic. Sometimes the ideas are re-ordered, but not too often.

I never work from a formal outline because my ideas are either well formulated at the start of this process or are quickly adjusted as I write. Perhaps I am combining the creation of an outline and writing at the same time. I have never had writer's block in more than 30 years of writing articles, journal papers, and books. The words have always flowed easily, in part because I think I am well prepared when I begin to write, having spent a lot of time reading, practicing Lean, and thinking prior to writing.
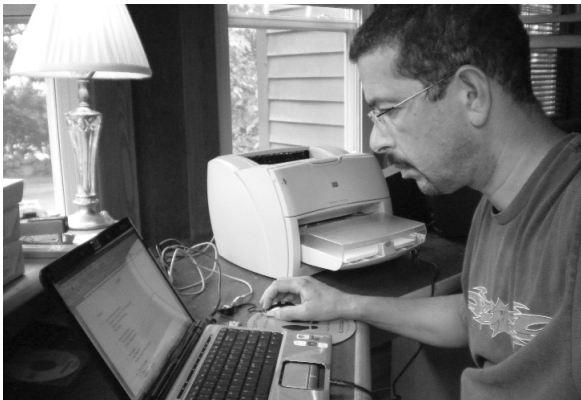
Only once did I use a formal outline, but it was not the type of outline you or I used in grade school. It was a detailed PowerPoint presentation that I worked on for over a year to explore and answer the question of why managers have so much difficulty sustaining Lean management. That became the outline for *REAL LEAN: The Keys to Sustaining Lean Management* (Volume Three). Interestingly, the process of writing the book revealed small logic problems in the PowerPoint slides, which I then corrected.

My first drafts have always been about 90% on-target (a high first-pass yield), and thus requiring minor editing. Rarely will I have to totally re-write more than a paragraph or two. The manuscripts for the *REAL LEAN* books are produced in about three weeks. Then I spend a week or two reading the manuscript several times and making thousands of small edits to ensure I am saying exactly what I mean to say. I am careful to make sure I select the words that best reflect my meaning and intent. All of this work is part-time, sandwiched between the courses I teach, daily bass guitar practice, yard work, cooking dinners, parenting, etc.

The next step is copy editing, which is where I always get a rude awakening. I am amazed to see the number of typos I have generated on each page. My copy editor, Mary Milewski, does not re-write my work; she corrects it and lets my

writing style come through. Copy editing generally takes a couple of weeks. We meet face-to-face to go over the copy edited manuscript page-by-page to ensure I understand every one of her edits. I incorporate the changes within a day or two.

The manuscript then goes to the graphic artist to create the book layout, line drawings, images, etc. Tom Bittel and I sit down and go over the manuscript page by page. The manuscript is marked-up to call attention to various special requirements. About three weeks later, the first draft of the book arrives for examination. The corrected draft is returned to Tom and the process is repeated one or two more times over the next week or two.

Once the layout is complete, I produce the index. This is a tedious and time-consuming task, but people who use Indexes a lot appreciate it when they are done well. Also, I know I am near the end of the process when the index file is done and sent to Tom to incorporate into the book file.

Tom delivers the cover and book pages in .pdf files saved according to the printer's specifications. I upload the title information and book files to the printer's Web site. The operations supervisor, Rachel, examines the files and notifies me if they are in good order or if they need to be corrected. If the files are good, a proof copy of the book arrives within a few days for me to review and approve. If the proof is good, I approve it and the book is released into the marketplace.
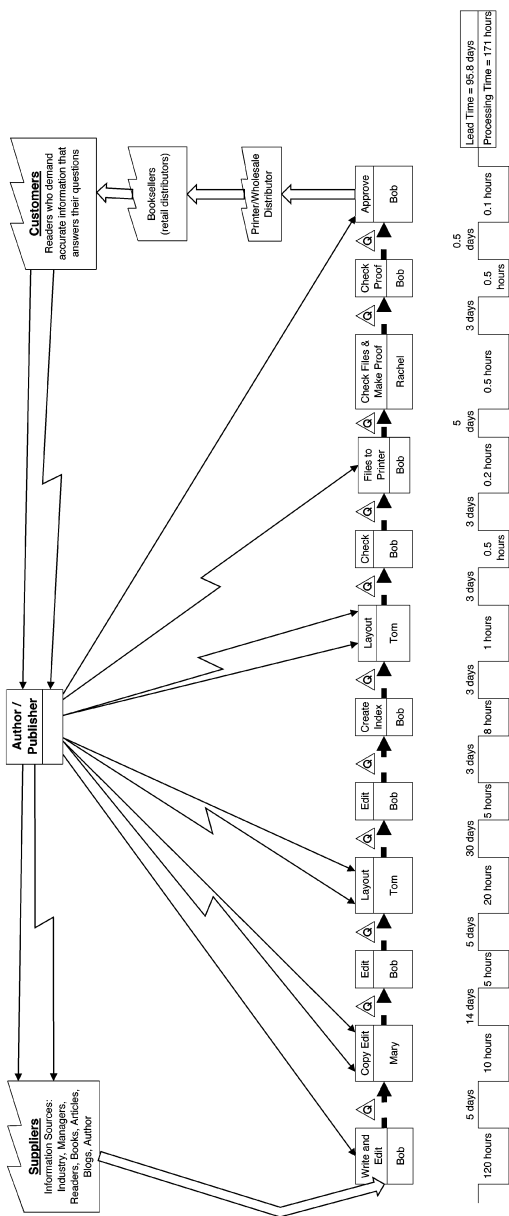
Lead-time for each volume of the *REAL LEAN* books, once writing begins, is about 95 days (1,520 hours over two part-time shifts) while the value-added time is about 170 hours,

with about 90% of that time being the consumed by the author in writing and several rounds of editing prior to copy editing, post-copy editing editing, and 2-3 rounds of reviewing and correcting the book pages prior to it being sent to the printer. The lead-time with a big-name corporate publisher is typically 3-4 times longer, about 9-12 months, while the value added time is about the same.

That is a general summary of the process, which is a big improvement over corporate publishing, but it can still be further improved. A value stream map illustrating my book writing and publishing process is shown on the facing page. The current state is a batch process, primarily because of the large mismatch in cycle times for each step in the process.

Please note that once the proof is approved, the process changes from batch-and-queue to Lean for selling and printing books. All of my books are print-on-demand titles; the customer orders from amazon.com, for example, who then pulls from a small supermarket and re-orders more books from the printer when supply is depleted. It is not a perfect pull system, but it is surely better than the old way of printing thousands of copies, keeping them in inventory, pushing the books onto bookstores, discounting to drive sales, crediting the bookstore when unsold books are returned, and then destroying the overproduction. The rapid trend towards e-books will result in a more effective pull system for fulfilling sales orders, but not for writing and publishing.

The next question is, how do Lean practices apply to the process of writing and producing a book? This is where it gets a bit tougher. Since writing and publishing are batch-and-queue, few

Lead Time = 95.8 days
Processing Time = 171 hours

**Customers**
Readers who demand accurate information that answers their questions

Booksellers (retail distributors)

Printer/Wholesale Distributor

**Author / Publisher**

**Suppliers**
Information Sources: Industry, Managers, Readers, Books, Articles, Blogs, Author

| Write and Edit | Copy Edit | Edit | Layout | Edit | Create Index | Layout | Check | Files to Printer | Check Files & Make Proof | Check Proof | Approve |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bob | Mary | Bob | Tom | Bob | Bob | Tom | Bob | Bob | Rachel | Bob | Bob |

120 hours | 10 hours | 5 hours | 20 hours | 5 hours | 8 hours | 1 hours | 0.5 hours | 0.2 hours | 0.5 hours | 0.5 hours | 0.1 hours

5 days | 14 days | 5 days | 30 days | 3 days | 3 days | 3 days | 3 days | 5 days | 3 days | 0.5 days

Lean practices and tools apply. Table 2 summarizes how I apply selected Lean practices to writing and book production:

**Table 2**

| Lean Practice | Application to Writing and Publishing |
|---|---|
| Five S | • Document ideas by keeping notes.<br>• Keep notes organized and in safe place.<br>• Review notes periodically and re-classify, edit, or discard bad or irrelevant ideas. |
| Just-in-Time | • Respond to actual demand of readers for the information they need.<br>• Produce books that are responsive to current and emerging needs of readers for practical information. |
| Heijunka | • Write or edit every day. |
| Autonomation | • Computerized word processing with automatic spelling correction and grammar check. |
| Standardized Work | • Follow established work sequence (see value stream map)<br>• Standard format for most books and chapters. |
| Teamwork | • Do things to help copy editor and graphic artist succeed in their work.<br>• Meet face-to-face. |

Note that I do not work to a takt time (e.g. 2 pages per day), and so standardized work is not practiced in the same way as in Lean management. Also, it is less clear on how visual controls can be used, other than by scheduling work activities. While some Lean practices and tools can be applied, others do not seem to fit well. That is how I see it now, but I am sure that the ways in which Lean tools and processes can be applied will become clearer as I think more about it.

**Notes**

[1] A main tenet of Lean management is to see reality as it actually is. This tenet, which I learned on day one of my Lean training in August of 1994, has always guided my writing. The result is that I bluntly call out bad management, which can make some executives feel uncomfortable or even personally offended. I know this because I periodically get feedback that says I could "attract more bees with honey." In other words, if I sugar coat reality then more people would read my books. My experience has been that the sugar coated approach as well as the direct approach I use in my books are imperfect and each has limitations. In general, managers, like any human, filter out what they do not like or pump in more of what they do like, regardless of the approach employed by the writer. I chose to be consistent with Lean principles and practices and just present the naked realities, knowing that managers' filters and pumps are not in my control. Nearly all non-profit and for-profit organizations that promote Lean management sugar coat reality in different ways and to different extents. This makes their customers think that Lean management is easier to practice than it really is, which is misleading. They do this mainly to perpetuate their self-interests. My situation is different; I maintain full-time employment as a university professor so I do not have to perpetuate my self-interest. Therefore, I tell it like it is. My pain is your gain. Organizations that sugar coat the personal and organizational challenges of Lean management lose credibility and force people to do re-work when managers finally become aware of the realities. Most managers do not like to engage in re-work, especially if they must confess that they misunderstood something from the start. As a result, senior managers will typically allow the practice of Lean management to stumble along or let it slowly fade away, replacing it with a new "program" or "initiative." The problem with sugar coating reality is that it sets managers up to fail and is inconsistent with the "Respect for People" principle. If I tell senior managers the truth they may decide to not adopt Lean management. That is their informed choice. Or, they may decide to adopt Lean management realizing to a great degree what they are committing themselves and their organizations to doing. The sugar coated approach means that most managers will engage in Fake Lean from the start and for many years thereafter, which is bad for all stakeholders. It also gives Lean a bad name, which, over time, will surely turn off future generations of managers. If my writing personally offends you – if it makes you realize that you are not a good manager – then perhaps I have done a better job than if my writing did not offend you. It means I am close to the truth. Instead of being upset with me, consider putting that negative

energy to good use: let it be the source of motivation for you to improve yourself and the organization.