

The Fundamental Role of Management in a LEAN environment

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About NextPhase Medical

NextPhase Medical Devices is the leading low- to medium-volume outsource partner for complex electronic manufacturing systems (EMS) and single-use medical devices in North America. NextPhase offers medical device design, development, contract manufacturing, and assembly services for Class I, II, and III single-use and EMS medical devices. With a focus on LEAN manufacturing and strategically located domestic and nearshore manufacturing facilities, NextPhase is positioned and committed to providing the highest quality services at the lowest cost.

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What is the primary role of management in a LEAN environment?

Some say it is talent development or removing roadblocks; others feel the key role of a good manager is to set the example or deliver results at any cost. Different management styles cultivate different cultures, so it is important for companies to be conscious and thoughtful about their collective management style.

In a LEAN environment, the organizational pyramid is flipped. It is understood that most significant contributions come from those adding the value to customers. In a manufacturing environment, the shop floor is at the top of the organization's hierarchy. To capture the opportunities the experts on the shop floor have to offer, a successful manager must earn the *hearts and minds* of employees before they can be successful.

Earning hearts suggests that a trusting and respectful relationship has been developed. Toyota emphasized this by including "*Respect for People*" as one of their core values. NextPhase Medical Devices recognizes this relationship by including "*Teamwork*" in its core values. When there is respectful and trusting relationships between colleagues—employee/employer, customer/supplier, supervisor/supervisee—the energy of team members can be focused on productive endeavors rather than on negotiating a complex relationship. There is no time or effort spent on the conflict that can result from a distrustful relationship. If team members trust and respect one another, their defenses subside and ideas flow freely—without fear of judgment or penalty. Prioritizing and capitalizing on this approach is at the heart of a continuous improvement operation.

Winning minds suggests that everyone's attention is focused on a common goal. If managers can articulate and effectively communicate a common purpose that can be understood and *owned* by all, it will set the tone and underlying direction of the company. Earning minds through a clear and tangible purpose therefore becomes a primary motivator and can provide a basis for every decision. Team members can operate with more autonomy, making the operation more efficient and boost individual morale and confidence.

It takes time, credible actions, and consistency to earn hearts and minds, and once accomplished, it will require some level of maintenance to sustain. In addition to day-to-day human interaction, NextPhase employs several tools in maintaining hearts and minds. An interactive strategic deployment process ensures the company purpose and goals are communicated to all. Key objectives are established, and every employee plays a role—and maintains a stake in achieving them. Metrics supporting the goals posted throughout the facility are available for anyone to see, and weekly all-hands-on company communication meetings review company objectives, monitor developments, and promote open communication with all levels of management and employees.

Once they earn hearts and minds and put in place sustainment systems, managers can effectively pursue their roles, and the company has set the stage for an environment of continuous improvement.