

## PODCAST 287: LEAN GOVERNMENT NOW

By Mark Graban



*Harry Kenworthy  
Principal and Manager  
Quality and Productivity  
Improvement Center  
<http://leangovcenter.com>*

*Harry worked with Dr. Deming in 1983-85 on a series of 2 day seminars throughout the US, sponsored by MIT.*

*He was one of the first practitioners to apply LEAN in the Government sector in the mid-90's.*

My guest for episode 287 of the Lean Blog Podcast was Harry Kenworthy, talking about his new book, *Lean Government Now*, which is being released on September 8. He is Principal and Manager of the Quality and Productivity Improvement Center (QPIC, LLC), a consulting organization he founded in 1984.

It had been three years since our first podcast conversation in episode 198, when we spoke about his work bringing Lean into local and state governments, as well as the influence of Dr. W. Edwards Deming, whom he worked with in the mid-1980s, and

many other concepts of interest to those in government and elsewhere.

### ***Lean Government Now***

Harry explained that the impetus for his book really happened around 2008 and 2009 when the work of the Quality and Productivity Improvement Center changed to really focus on government, thanks in large part to the recession.

“There was a lot of need for government to help themselves out as far as balancing their budgets. They have to balance their budget of course, with the exception of the

federal government; so, the demand was out there to do some things differently,” Harry said. “Our focus over the last nine years -- time flies -- we’ve been focused on government at the federal agency, state, city, county, and K [Kindergarten] through grade 12 educational level.”

***“As you know, when you’re embroiled in all sorts of other activities including consulting, speaking, those types of things, getting a book done takes some time.”***

Harry said that, as his company was doing this work, his customers were regularly asking him why he wasn't publishing a book on the topic.

"As you know, when you're embroiled in all sorts of other activities including consulting, speaking, those types of things, getting a book done takes some time. This is about a two-year labour of love that finally came to fruition. And I'm kind of happy about it; I'm looking forward to it."

In speaking with some of the clients his consulting company is currently working with in 22 states, many are looking forward to the book's release date with interest, said Harry. He explained that part of that interest stems from the book not being a traditional book in the sense that it's more of an action guide as opposed to being the usual Lean theory recast in the context of government.

"I mean we do cover a lot of government examples, but within the book, it's structured more as a training and facilitation manual to basically [begin to create] a Lean structure and a Lean government initiative, so in that sense it's more of a bulleted format," Harry said. "There is the government aspect to it, but aside from the government examples that are in there everything that's in that book is relevant for anybody that's starting a Lean initiative."

"It will take you through step-by-step in there: what you need to do to put in place a Lean initiative, what you need to do as far as training people, what you need to do as far as implementation. So, it is very specific in terms of steps you need to take."

## Lean Government Examples

Harry said that since we last spoke, more people in government are realizing Lean is not a fad or fable, that there are a lot of examples of it working well in government today.

The Quality and Productivity Improvement Center highlights some of those examples on its website <http://leangovcenter.com> under the tab "Government Lean Projects."

"We vet these sites and we talk to the individuals involved and a lot of them contact us to update the information that's on there, so we, in essence, act as a national clearinghouse to provide information that people can link into. I suspect if you went into the specific sites and drilled into them, you'd be into over 1,000 Kaizen events," Harry said. "So, it's a great way to benchmark, too."

## Lean Government Elsewhere

Harry said that Lean government is not only happening in the US, but in other countries as well. His consulting company has a very strong relationship with the United Kingdom, and also has links with Australia, and Canada.

***"You've got to turn on the lightbulbs in the executives' minds as far as what's going on and what Lean is all about and have them practice in a workshop environment."***

"Now there are other organizations that are focusing on benchmarking, and in that sense, that's broader based, so even in the United Arab Emirates, or Saudi

Arabia, or Singapore, or places like that, there are benchmarking activities going on. And sometimes there's Lean linkages into that. We are actually in contact with one organization in Russia, whose been doing work in Lean government too," He added.

## It's About People

No matter where Lean is being practiced, one of the major tenets, which Harry emphasised in the title of the book, is greater service, or the ability to have greater capacity to provide more things for the greater good of people, all while creating a much higher level of employee engagement.

In a recent KaiNexus webinar that Harry gave, titled The 10 Commandments for Lean in Government (and Beyond!) (which you can watch on the KaiNexus YouTube channel), he quoted a Toyota executive, who said, "The most important thing for Toyota is people. Toyota is all about teaching and training people and building a culture of continuous improvement."

## Management Engagement

While Harry believes there are government organizations that have made great progress in creating that culture, unfortunately, a lot of times that leaders don't get it, and just want to hire someone to train some staff to learn how to do a few Kaizen events or do some initial training.

"Most of the things you see is somebody wants you to come in and go ahead and train some yellow belts for us...let's do some training for a couple of weeks and run it through a certification program, And, you know they're doing that in an environment that is not business as usual, so the

ability for that to be sustained is, I think, really very poor. It may happen on rare occasions if somebody up above gets it, but otherwise, sad.”

Harry explained that his organization has offered two-day boot camps for multiple years, for which they insist that top management attend. If top management doesn’t attend, his company walks away.

“You’ve got to turn on the lightbulbs in the executives’ minds as far as what’s going on and what Lean is all about and have them practice in a workshop environment. We insist they attend all Kaizen report out events too, because that reinforces what happened in the Kaizen but it also causes them to say, ‘Hey, wait a minute, what they did there, I can actually do in my particular department.’ So, it’s those types of things that are really going to drive sustainable success. It’s tough to get the attention of top management, we try to be very insistent upon that. And I’d say with rare exception, we’re extremely successful,” Harry said. “Now, obviously when we do that, there’s other organizations that are offering consulting services that they’ll just wind up selling training.”

While management engagement is important, Harry stressed the importance of remembering who can be considered a leader.

“We all know what the challenges are, but, on the other hand, I speak at various conference and in organizations—and we touch on this in the book too from a leadership perspective—people say, ‘Jeez, I can’t do any of this stuff because my city manager, county manager, state agency director,

school superintendent, isn’t going to do anything and they don’t get it.’ I say, ‘Well, our definition of a leader is anybody that has people reporting to them or working with them on their team, so you can impact that team, so you’re a leader in that sense.’

***“A lot of the time, once you get your foot in the door, and you’re working on the other stuff, you get a much more enlightened, engaged management that starts to say, hmm, maybe these guys from the outside really do know what they’re talking about, maybe we ought to do some of this stuff.”***

“You would like to believe that as you’re achieving success, that other people around you will start to take notice and maybe you can actually migrate some stuff both horizontally and vertically in the organization, but that’s much longer than if the top team gets it and is driving it.”

Harry said that sometimes when he answers a request for quotation (RFQ) to help an organization with a Kaizen event approach, he will include in the caveat that the top management team, as well as anybody that’s going to be a project manager, has to attend the initial training, and he will also provide many other recommendations in the notes.

“But, a lot of the time, once you get your foot in the door, and you’re working on the other stuff, you get a much more enlightened, engaged

management that starts to say, ‘hmm, maybe these guys from the outside really do know what they’re talking about, maybe we ought to do some of this stuff.’ And that’s how you kind of morph that way. But, in a lot of those cases, because of government it winds up becoming another quotation process,” he said.

## **One-Stop Shopping**

In addition to leadership engagement, another important conceptual belief Harry stresses is one-stop shopping for those receiving services from government.

“One-stop shopping comes down to a simple definition, which is that I walk up to somebody because I need a service done, that person in front of me can engage and do the complete service, and provide me with the output while I’m there,” Harry said. “And then there’s another one obviously, which is fundamental, how do you get it right the first time? How do you wind up getting somebody to walk in the door, do the transaction and everything’s right the first time.”

## **SNAP Rework**

One jaw-dropping example Harry gave concerned a social service agency and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which many people refer to as “food stamps.” As he explained, people would come into the agency to apply for the program and would have to fill out a one-page form and leave it there, however nobody at the regional sites would interface with him or her.

“Then, you find out later when you’re concentration mapping, the actual one-page forms that are coming in dynamically by the people in the agency have, in some cases, as high as a 77

percent error rate, in a one-page form, because the information's not right. So, what happens if it's not right? Well, at least at the time you had a 45-day mandate to register these people to the SNAP program if they came in the door with their form, now you go beyond that and you've got the federal government concerned why it's taking so long, and you've got to track the person down," Harry explained. "So, all that is rework and fixing errors."

### Customer Service Backlog

Another great example of Lean in action in government Harry gave was in a customer service area charged with handling customer complaints that was suffering from a long backlog.

"A lot of calls were coming in saying, 'Hey, when are you going to handle this?' The first thing we did, and we

do this a lot, is what is the law or statute say you have to do?" Harry explained. "When they looked at it they said, 'Oh my God, more than half the stuff we're doing shouldn't be handled by us at all. It should be handled through a small claims court type of process.' So, in a fairly quick month or so, four people became two, and way-past-due became on time. And there's multiple examples of things like that."

***"Practising lean is just living that [idea that] people are the most important resource, and the high-level respect for individuals and developing your people, I guess that's how I would sum it up."***

### Practicing Lean

I wrapped up our conversation by asking Harry what he feels "practicing Lean" means.

"Practising Lean is just living that [idea that] people are the most important resource and the high-level respect for individuals and developing your people, I guess that's how I would sum it up," He said. "That's the other fascinating thing about this practice is that, you know my background way back when was in manufacturing up until 2004, but since that time it's been full time consulting, and you just learn so much, so many fascinating things you couldn't imagine, in government."

You can learn more about Lean Government by ordering Harry's new book, *Lean Government Now*, on Amazon.



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