

## Lean in Healthcare: Do your people have the behaviors and skills to make it a success?



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### Introduction

Every hospital is striving to improve quality and reduce costs. Many are adopting processes and tools from other industries, like Lean or Six Sigma. Most however, are realizing only moderate success because physicians, nurses and hospital staff struggle with embracing change.

*“Most companies miss seeing the blood flow of TPS – the human resource philosophies and strategies that make it work at Toyota.”*

Michael Hoseus, co-author of the bestseller, *Toyota Culture, The Heart and Soul of the Toyota Way*

### The Challenge of Adopting Lean in Healthcare

At the heart of the problem is the basic fact that many professionals in healthcare do not have the abilities to work in a Lean environment. Hiring in healthcare has focused on clinical and technical skills, not high performance abilities. Now, health care leaders are asking their workforce to perform critical tasks for which they were neither trained nor selected.

Sam Agnew, surgeon and founder of Orthopaedic Trauma Consultants, LLC works with hospitals to improve care and the financial return on trauma programs through the implementation of Lean. Interestingly, Dr. Agnew does not start with process change. Instead he backs up a step and examines the hospital's success rate in finding and retaining the type of people who can implement Lean tools successfully. “Processes like Lean require a specific personality to be truly efficient. Trying to mold or mandate people into the Toyota way is more problematic than one could possibly imagine.”

### Looking to Human Resources for the Solution

Progressive Healthcare HR professionals recognize this challenge. The American Society for Healthcare Human Resources Administration (ASHHRA) recently convened a forum on the role of human resources in advancing operational efficiencies and effectiveness.

This group concluded, among other things:

- Organizational culture must change to place a greater emphasis on teamwork and coordinated care; and
- This begins with the ability to hire the right people.

The first logical step in any continuous improvement initiative is to identify the talent competencies required for future success and begin making selection decisions that will support the new work culture.

- Teamwork and collaboration require that everyone from nurses to physicians to administrative staff must display patience and understanding when listening to differing opinions.
- Staff must encourage new ideas and explore different approaches, thinking in non-traditional ways to accomplish tasks.
- Everyone in the system must embrace and manage change and demonstrate the ability to make that change happen.

Attention to these competencies is almost non-existent in the classroom and clinical training of healthcare professionals. The same is true for the hiring process. Successful organizations in other industries use proven tools and methods to identify the players that have these skills and will thrive in a changing environment and adopt Lean philosophies.

*Failure to hire, develop and promote to the right competencies means that the investment in adopting these programs is wasted.*

The bottom line is that some people have these competencies and thrive in a high-performance environment and some people do not. It is critical to differentiate between the two in the hiring process.

Toyota wants team members with the highest levels of accountability and ownership. Healthcare needs the same thing. While Toyota's culture certainly fosters these characteristics, the process is successful because they hire employees who have the capacity to succeed.

Training and process change only go so far. The people being trained must have the basic foundational abilities. At its core, the hiring and promotion process must be built around the competencies necessary to succeed in a Lean environment.