

The Process Palooza Podcast

Episode 9: Optimizing, Transforming, Disrupting – A Process Palooza 2025 Preview

[00:00:00] **Todd Andersen:** Welcome to the Process Palooza podcast. Your insiders guide to the ideas, innovations, and people shaping one of the most engaging continuous improvement events around process palooza. I'm Todd Anderson, marketing specialist at UC, San Diego, part of the Process Palooza Planning team, and your host for today's episode.

We're gearing up for Process Palooza 2025, taking place August 6th and seventh, right here at UC San Diego. Registration is officially open, and our agenda is live packed with insightful keynotes, hands-on sessions and dynamic discussions centered on continuous improvement and the power of [00:01:00] AI. This episode is your preview and a personal invitation.

Whether you've attended in the past or are brand new to the event, you'll wanna hear what's in store. We'll talk with one of the founding forces behind Process Palooza, Mojgan Amini, and welcome Tina Austin, an AI expert and first time speaker at the event.

Then we'll wrap things up with a special message from Dr. Vince Kellen, UC San Diego CIO, and longtime champion of this initiative. So let's dive into what makes Process Palooza a one of a kind experience.

Joining me now is Mojgan Amini, one of the original visionaries behind Process Palooza, a leader in Lean Six Sigma, and someone who's helped shape this event into what it is today. Mojgan, thanks so much for being here.

[00:01:56] **Mojgan Amini:** Well, thank you for having me here, Todd. I'm really looking forward to [00:02:00] this conversation with you.

[00:02:01] **Todd Andersen:** Let's take it back to the beginning. Can you share how Process Palooza came to life and what inspired its creation?

[00:02:09] **Mojgan Amini:** Sure thing. Well, let me take you back. It was 2017 when, I recall the continuous improvement methodology of choice was selected at the campus. That was Lean Six Sigma, and we had just brought together and coordinated our IT department to be unified as one larger department.

And so there was a need there to really get everyone on the same page with standard processes and really looking for efficiencies and reducing redundancies. So we decided to put all 400 staff through this training, which happened to be a very experiential you know, engaging simulation learning Lean Six Sigma, and actually putting it into action.

It was an all day [00:03:00] training, 40 people at a time. And so off we went, 40 at a time. People were going through, light bulbs were going off. And I remember the last session, the last 40 cohort that we had in there. We saw this energy flying as usual, and I remember sitting with our CIO Vince Kellen and thinking like, "how do we harness this great energy to improve our own processes, our own campus real processes, not a simulation?"

And that's where the seed was planted right then and there. And. A few months later, we launched the first Process Palooza event, which was a pretty much an all day competition to put Lean Six Sigma into action for actual processes on the campus and improve them in a kind of a facilitated but [00:04:00] natural, organic fashion.

Lots of energy in the room and needless to say, it was a big success. Leadership support there. There were people celebrating... prizes. It was just a, an excellent experience all around. And so that right then and there, we decided it needed to be an annual event, and that's where it all started.

[00:04:25] **Todd Andersen:** It's incredible how it's grown from a single day event into a two day experience with hands-on challenges, keynotes, breakout sessions, and networking. What kinda work happens behind the scenes to keep evolving and making each year different?

[00:04:42] **Mojgan Amini:** Yes, it's been amazing to see the growth. It just puts a smile on my face.

It started out as a, you know, a modest gathering of staff to really put the hands down and work on a process improvement and, you know, [00:05:00] get some benefits and recognition along the way. To a full scale, multi-day. I wanna call it an extravaganza. It's not a conference 'cause there's so much going on and so many unique facets.

So the competition is still there. We've added. Breakout sessions. Many tracks of breakout sessions. There's keynote speakers. There are, you know, there's the expo hall, there are poster sessions, there's networking going on. There's a pre-conference, pre-event. trainings and certifications offered, and there's, you

know, alumni celebrations of lean practitioners and the list goes on and we do get feedback from attendees.

We listen to the voice of the customer and try to adjust. Of course, there's a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes to make it all happen. And that [00:06:00] is, that's no small feat. I just wanna say that's no small feat. But luckily we have folks from across the campus, different departments, even outside of our own university, who've rAIsed their hand to help to volunteer their skills and services to help make the, you know, the event what it is.

So a lot of work goes on to the, you know, selection of the event content and breakout sessions. And then of course the competition itself, which is now called the Great Innovate and making sure we select the right processes that are relatable and the outcomes bring value to the campus. So, bottom line, yes, it's growing to what it needs to be, but luckily we have folks who are interested in.

Supporting the growth and lending at hand.

[00:06:54] **Todd Andersen:** Lean Six Sigma and continuous improvement are at the heart of this event. As a [00:07:00] leader in this space, how do you see these mindsets helping organizations, especially large institutions like UC San Diego?

[00:07:09] **Mojgan Amini:** Oh, well, I love this question because I do feel like continuous improvement should be foundational to almost anything that we do.

Anything that the institution provides and it's just a way of thinking. It's a structured way of looking at problems as opportunities, and they could be small, medium, large. They don't have to be kind of, you know, these big efforts. So daily improvements all add up anyway, having that mindset.

Really comes in handy, especially when you're in kind of difficult, challenging situations like we're facing today across the university, across the state, across [00:08:00] different industries where we're looking for efficiencies, we're looking for cost savings and improved flow, and just all around process improvements.

So that's where kind of looking at. Challenges as opportunities come into play. You know, you've heard the term, never let a good crisis go to waste. Well, that's kind of where we are, where we can transform the way we work just by thinking differently. And so that's why I think yes, it's woven into the fabric of what process Palooza is, but really.

Comes in handy at any given point in time. It's a way to, you know, make life better for people, for workers, for, you know, the users of our services. And so everything I feel builds on top of that.

[00:08:57] **Todd Andersen:** This year, Process Palooza [00:09:00] leans into the AI revolution. What are your thoughts on how AI intersects with continuous improvement?

How are you seeing that reflected in this year's programming?

[00:09:11] **Mojgan Amini:** I was wondering when you're gonna ask this question. Yes, without a doubt. I think continuous improvement and AI are really good partners. They go hand in hand, so naturally, you know, prosa in the AI. Age is a natural fit. I think. You know, with process improvement, continuous improvement, Lean Six Sigma, there's a lot of analysis, there's a lot of ideating, there's a lot of, you know, decision making that goes on.

There's a lot of information to assess and then even just making the changes that you think will help. With the process could be automation, it could be processes, improving process flow, et cetera, [00:10:00] and all of that can leverage the unique functions and aspects of AI. Even on the other end, like learning about process improvement or having a mentor or, you know, prompting people on how to create a problem statement.

You know, accelerating ideation it all goes hand in hand. So I really am looking forward to this year's breakout sessions. I know there's a lot of information related to how AI is being applied and to bring these improvements to fruition and to light and, you know, it's just the. Big platform that we're standing on right now.

I think the possibilities are almost endless, and so I'm really looking forward to it. Thanks for asking that question.

[00:10:50] **Todd Andersen:** Thanks Mojgan. As always, your insight sets the tone for what Process Palooza is all about.

[00:10:57] **Mojgan Amini:** Thank you, Todd. It was a pleasure to speak with you today.[00:11:00]

[00:11:04] **Todd Andersen:** Next up, we are joined by Tina Austin, a professor and AI adoption expert who works with both USC and UCLA. She's a first time

attendee and speaker at Process Palooza, and she's bringing a fresh perspective to this year's AI theme. Tina, welcome.

[00:11:23] **Tina Austin:** Thank you. Thank you so much, Todd, for having me here.

[00:11:26] **Todd Andersen:** you've spent your career focused on how organizations adopt emerging technologies, especially artificial intelligence.

So what's your take on how AI has evolved in just the last few years and where's it headed?

[00:11:41] **Tina Austin:** So I've actually spent the most recent three or four years focusing on what you just mentioned before, that I was teaching in biomedical research, biomedical ethics, and regenerative medicine. And so AI, generative AI, once it became more popular and you had.

Chat GPT [00:12:00] I think the week that Chat GPT came out, I started experimenting with it. I took polls in the classroom to see how many of my students were already using it. And it was exciting to use it for critical thinking and use it for seeing where the mistakes are. And I remember that year at UCLA, you know, we were, a lot of people were surprised.

Wow, this is at first it was just the excitement of how extremely smart it seems to be. And then it immediately, it was. Very shocking to most people as when they realize it's just really good at predicting the next word in the sentence. And how if you don't realize that or if you're not looking at it critically, it's easy to mistake AI's confidence for actual knowledge and realizing that language models are not knowledge models and realizing that, you know.

For STEM and science fields, you have to be even more critical than a writing professor or you know, someone who's just looking at essays. And [00:13:00] so over the years, I feel like most people are now catching up with a lot of the nuance involved with bringing AI into education. And I see the future as an AI realist.

I see myself in the middle as a Centrist. I would say that with the way that people are looking at it more critically now, I'm very optimistic that if we do take control of these, the regulation and the ethics there, we could have a promising future with AI

[00:13:30] **Todd Andersen:** now without giving too much away. Can you give us a sneak peek of your session at Process Palooza, which is called "AI Agents, Custom GPTs, STEM Minds and Smarter Workflows: AI Lessons for Real World Processes."

[00:13:46] **Tina Austin:** I love that question because, you know, everybody's been, you know, around late last year talking about how 2025 is going to be the year of AI agents and it still is. There's still a lot of talk about agentic AI and [00:14:00] however. The two extremes I was talking about earlier may describe it as you know, as a hyped up term that, oh, agents, what does it do?

And AI agents are something that my students have built in the classroom. It's really good for automation and I'm gonna be looking at this more critically with instructors and how we can apply. Some good use cases for improving critical thinking in the classroom, but also kind of going behind how they're built and how some of the promises in industry may not exactly be something students in the classroom can.

Can really implement or we don't want, you know, to give away our privacy to third party apps. That would be, that would have an agentic role in the classroom, if that makes sense. So, it's very exciting. I'm really excited to talk about how in real workflows all of this makes sense. And I'll also [00:15:00] be sharing.

What I've learned from teaching various AI tools from different disciplines. So I've been teaching across different disciplines with bringing AI into the classroom and not AI, but just responsible use of AI and how we can find, use good use cases for faculty and for students in a way that can actually help with learning.

And so I'm really excited to share, my personal experiences in the classroom and what I've learned from faculty workshops. They've also, over the two past two years, been doing faculty workshops at CSU and UCLA and USC. So, I'm gonna be bringing all of that into the session and I'm really excited to, you know, share with faculty and see what, you know they bring to the table as well.

[00:15:43] **Todd Andersen:** This is your first Process Palooza. So I'm curious what drew you to the event? Why did you wanna be involved this year and what are you looking forward to?

[00:15:52] **Tina Austin:** Over the years, AI's connected me to really amazing people, folks that I would've never, ever imagined I would be connected with

[00:16:00] because I was in my world of biomedical research and molecular biology.

And then AI connected me to, to a wide range of disciplines, a wide range of amazing people I got to present this year at ASU GSV as a AI innovator, Woman of the Year, whatever you would like to call it. And so I got connected to brilliant faculty scientists, students, presenters, and I remember one of the highly recommended that I look into process palooza that I previously wasn't aware of because, you know, I'm at UCLA and this would be my third.

Conference in San Diego just this year. So I'm really excited to go there and meet faculty over there, many of whom I've already shared panels with, both at the there's an academic integrity conference two years ago there, and then there's also the office of the president, UC Office of the President.

I talked last month, so I also know folks from there. So it's kind of like all of these circles [00:17:00] coming together. Yeah.

[00:17:02] **Todd Andersen:** Well, we can't wait to hear your session. Thanks so much Tina. We'll see you in August.

[00:17:08] **Tina Austin:** Thank you, and I'm excited too and I'm looking forward to seeing everyone there. Thank you, Todd.

[00:17:17] **Todd Andersen:** Before we wrap up, we have a special message from Dr. Vince Kellen, the Chief Information Officer here at UC San Diego. Vince has been a vocal supporter of Process Palooza since its inception and continues to champion innovation and efficiency across the University. Let's hear what he has to say about this year's event.

[00:17:41] **Vince Kellen:** Ever since our first Process Palooza in 2017, we've noticed the enthusiasm the attendees bring. It's your enthusiasm that has made this event what it is. In fact, it's more than a conference now. It's a social movement. This year in August, we're gonna be hosting Process Palooza again. We're gonna have some interesting [00:18:00] examples of AI and generative AI in use inside organizations.

Anyone from SoCal can join whether you work at an organization or a company, or you're a UC San Diego employee, and of course, we're inviting all of our colleagues in the UC system across the state to attend. Come join the Process Palooza community. We look forward to seeing you in August.

[00:18:33] **Todd Andersen:** A big thank you to Mojgan Amini, Tina Austin, and Dr. Vince Kellen for helping us set the stage for Process Palooza 2025. So here's your recap: Process Palooza is taking place on August 6th through 7th at UC San Diego. Registration is open and you can find a link to register as well as more information about the big event at [00:19:00] processpalooza.ucsd.edu.

That's processpalooza.ucsd.edu. And while you're registering, don't forget to explore our exciting add-on training opportunities, which include a Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt training, Kaizen Workshop, and a Root Cause Analysis Workshop. Space for each add-on training is limited, so register today. You don't wanna miss out on those opportunities.

The agenda for Process Palooza is live and still growing with topics ranging from Lean Six Sigma to AI to real world problem solving. And if you're feeling inspired, explore past episodes of The Process Palooza Podcast also processpalooza.ucsd.edu. Whether you're deep into continuous improvement or just curious about how AI is changing the game Process Palooza has something for you.

We can't wait to welcome you this August. Until then, [00:20:00] keep improving and stay curious. This is Todd signing off from The Process Palooza podcast. We'll see you all soon.