

The Process Palooza Podcast

Episode 7: Insights from a Black Belt Instructor - Continuous Improvement from a Bird's Eye View

[00:00:00] **Miguel Rodriguez:** Hello listeners and welcome back. This is. Episode one of season two of the official podcast of Process Palooza. This is the podcast dedicated to an event that is dedicated to continuous process improvement, any kind of process, any kind of steps leading toward a goal in any organization, large or small.

My name is Miguel Rodriguez. I work for UC San Diego as an educational technology analyst. But I am also your host for this very podcast, and I'm very excited to start this season two. We'll have episodes leading up to the August Process Palooza. So, stay tuned at the end of this episode for more [00:01:00] information on how you can register and join us at that event.

But in the meantime, I am going to cut this introduction a little short because. In my view, we have a perfect way to begin this second season of the Process Palooza podcast. Earlier this year, I earned my Black Belt certification for a particular continuous improvement methodology called Lean Six Sigma.

My instructor was Jim Athon as part of uc, San Diego's. Extended studies and yes, it was a lot of work, and my process is still rolling along in its improvements, but I'm very proud to have my Black belt certification now, and I decided, you know what, Jim would be a great person to kick off season two of the podcast.

So, this episode will really [00:02:00] be a bird's eye view of continuous improvement philosophy, in particular lean. Six Sigma, but really, it's about the culture shift and what it really means to improve processes to make all of our jobs much easier. So again, my name is Miguel Rodriguez. I look forward to presenting to you Jim Athon as part of this episode.

Remember, this will be a monthly series. You can look for us on LinkedIn at the Process Palooza, LinkedIn, or you could always subscribe via SoundCloud or wherever you get your podcasts. But in the meantime, let's go right ahead and introduce Jim Athon, my Black Belt instructor.

As an introduction, why don't you let us know who you are and what you do?

[00:02:57] **Jim Athon:** Hi, so I'm Jim Athon.

I [00:03:00] work with UC San Diego as an associate instructor conducting the black belt training.

I also do root cause analysis training and do coaching for projects.

[00:03:08] **Miguel Rodriguez:** So obviously you have a lot of experience with continuous improvement methodology. So, to start us off, I was wondering for you personally, was there a moment in your life that made you realize the value of this type of methodology or lean thinking or the various other ways that we talk about this concept?

[00:03:29] **Jim Athon:** Sure. Yeah. I was trained as an industrial engineer. So, I worked as an industrial engineer for several years doing project work, even time studies and plant layouts. And so, a lot of the tools that we use in lean, I had been trained on as part of my undergraduate. I was working in manufacturing in the automotive industry as a manufacturing engineer, buying equipment, supporting a production line and so forth.

And they had been engaged with me some consultants who came out of Motorola to train [00:04:00] in Lean Six Sigma, actually just in Six Sigma at the time, this was the mid-nineties had a chance to go to the training become a black belt, which was still relatively new, but it was I had a chance to go to the black belt training and started learning the tools.

I was so far in over my head. The, a very similar experience to a lot of the black belts are going through the training now. And I was able to learn the methodology and it's, it's a classic example. If I'd have known then what I know now, it'd have been a lot easier experience, but that's part of the learning.

When I first went through, I thought a lot of it was necessary additional tools. For problems already knew how to solve because we always had a natural, a sort of knack for solving problems. I'd worked on cars as a child. I had, played with model airplanes and model cars. I had worked on automobiles.

I had done a lot of handiwork. So, by the time I went to college, I had, rebuilt part. I had done a lot of that sort of thing. So, I was okay at, solving problems that were more or less, if you will, superficial. But Miguel, what happened is when I got back from black belt [00:05:00] training and got over my first project.

Okay. I was given projects that were much more complex to solve that required deep statistical analysis or required designed experimentation or even careful lean evaluation of a workplace. And what I found is I didn't know what I was doing so I relied on the tools. that was for me my pivotal moment what.

I just relied on what the tools would tell me. So, I did my first design experiment after I got through with my first, black belt training about three or four months later. And lo and behold, I discovered several things. The other thing that really became obvious to me was tying what I observed and go to gimbal, what I observed in natural.

Just a natural observation of a process, the issues they were having and be able to start tying that back to more sophisticated methods to solve problems that I didn't know how to solve. And so, getting actually deeper into the tools as opposed to just You know, more or less the, this, the top level tools, but getting deeper into tools, I really began to [00:06:00] see opportunities to improve really complicated processes and make meaningful change.

So that was really my pivotal moment was my first DOE. And then it, cascaded from there and started building from that.

[00:06:13] **Miguel Rodriguez:** And just in case you don't know, as an aside here, DOE stands for Design of Experiments. Moving on.

So, it's, it feels like it was almost a. Experience of, oh, you're out in the ocean, but suddenly these tools are like a life raft has come up to you and you were able to take it and realize what the use was in the moment.

[00:06:37] **Jim Athon:** Yeah. How about this? I'll build on that analogy. It's I had always played around in water near the shore, that was no more than waist deep. All of the sudden you get washed out into the deep water where it's 50 foot deep and you can't just rely on: if all things go bad, just stand up on the bottom. There is no bottom. You had to rely on the tools.

[00:06:56] **Miguel Rodriguez:** And yeah, that's a great analogy. You mentioned taking the black belt at a time [00:07:00] when it, it can be quite challenging.

And so, for listeners new to this, can you give a high-level view of black belt certification, what it represents and why it is important?

[00:07:11] **Jim Athon:** Historically, black belts were trained as full time employees.

I was literally taking out; I was taken out of a plant. We went to Cincinnati. For five weeks over a five-month period, the good thing was you're in an isolated area with colleagues who are working towards the same goal. The disadvantage was it was so much information in such a short period of time. It was hard to process it all.

And you get back into the plant, you have other things you have to do. And the way we were, the way we're doing it now, it's a very similar structure. We have actually included tools that weren't included in the original tool set back when I was trained and taking things that we don't use very often to hold those to the side.

And if we need to teach them, I'll teach them on an ad hoc basis to one or two students, or, do a single student go through the project. But now our training is actually organized [00:08:00] four hours a week over an 11 week program. People start with a project just as we did back in the original day, and actually that kind of just as a side note that drifted off and so as you got into the early 2000s, people would give training without requiring projects.

And so people could go in and see the tools and be able to repeat what they had learned. But it's until you start actually applying the tools that's when they begin to make sense and really become meaningful for you. One of the things that we do at UC San Diego is we stretch the training out over a period of time you're not out of the facility for long periods of time, it's four hours a week, but you're also working with project in your immediate work area.

And again, the premise of the Six Sigma belt system was that you weren't an expert in your own process. Rather, you became an expert in the problem solving tools so they could take someone who was qualified as a black belt and put them in any situation, whether it's an office environment, processing invoices, whether it's an HR environment in new hire onboarding, whether it's in a very detailed, [00:09:00] manufacturing environment, life sciences, doing snippets of DNA or, even manufacturing, components for spacecraft.

It's all processes and it's all learning how to understand processes through tools like process mapping and, capability analysis and fishbone diagrams and so forth. So we're taking these tools and we're going over them a bit at a time every week. And if students apply those tools in the following weeks, they begin to make profound realizations about their own processes and begin to identify opportunities for improvement.

So at the end of it, they have completed a project that they worked. At the same time as they were going through training and applying the tools more or less in real time, so that they have a chance to really solidify the learning and have a chance to make applications. So the program that we're, that the way that we're administering has, is actually the most successful model I've been associated with, because I've done the, I've conducted myself in my own consulting practice, the three week model and the four week model where people are out of the plant [00:10:00] for a week at a time, and it.

You had a very low qualification rate and finish rate. Now finishing this program, you've got your black belt. You actually have a really good idea of how to start assessing. These problems that we face and you have a methodology to go through the DMAIC methodology. And so again, practice makes perfect.

The more you do that, the easier it is to go into more diverse environments and apply the problem solving problem. Problem solving methodology in any, I was with a colleague just last week and she does marketing and she's been through the training as well. She says, this is the old, and she's worked in education her entire career.

Especially say, continuing education for adults. And she said, this is the single methodology that I've ever, this is the only methodology I've ever seen that is universally applicable across all industries because of the nature of everybody has processes and all processes have issues.

[00:10:50] **Miguel Rodriguez:** I am in your black belt course, so I get firsthand experience of how you teach it.

And we'll talk about that a little bit, but you mentioned already [00:11:00] practice makes perfect. So I'm wondering from your past black belt achievers how often are they able to. Put this in practice. If process improvement is not a direct part of their job description.

[00:11:17] **Jim Athon:** The one way that we will explain that when we begin, and we even do like overviews, we will differentiate between working in a process, which we all do.

We're all working in various processes that are there, familiar with our own work environment, as opposed to working on the process where you extricate in your process. You look at it in its holistic form and you begin to identify where

the opportunities are. We all have situations where we work in processes and we realized that didn't make any sense.

Why are we doing that? That's rework. I'm doing this a second time. Why am I doing this sort of thing? When we work on a process, we extricate ourselves out. So the goal would be. For those obviously that are full time black belts, they would apply this over and over because they're constantly working projects.

When I was a [00:12:00] black belt, I was working five or six projects at the same time. But as a regular practitioner, you're a manager or you're, an engineer or you're a scientist, or you're a nurse and you're working, you're back in your work environment after the training's over still, we should be identifying opportunities because we're always seeing them, but now we have a way to extricate ourselves, at least.

A couple hours a week and start figuring out how do I resolve this issue? So I don't keep saying, fixing the same thing over and over. So it's applicable from the perspective that people learn that one, they have the ability to change their own processes. And two, these negative outcomes are not inevitable.

All of it can be prevented. If we have the time, we have the buy in, we have the methodology.

[00:12:43] **Miguel Rodriguez:** There are two keywords right there. I'm going to bring up Costco as I think, a pretty high standard of application by people who are in the process. Because what they do is they actually have, at least from what I've seen of the [00:13:00] lens making facility in San Diego, they have a group that is a group made out of people on the line, but who are, They meet, I don't know if it's monthly or bi weekly or whatever to look at problems and decide what they're going to improve, like they make process improvement, just one of the tasks that people are doing And that's partly buy in as you said. and that's a culture shift. And I think it's, that's part of the challenge that some large enterprises might have, what would you say is a way to get to a culture shift that is, as extreme as, and I don't want to say extreme, but as built in, as integrated as that is.

[00:13:46] **Jim Athon:** The organization from, not just from the bottom up, but from the top down has to come to the realization that no matter how carefully you plan a new process, no matter how effectively you've run [00:14:00] that in the past, the only constant has changed, everything is constantly changing the way our processes work, the technology, the interface, even the expectation of the consumer or the customer, because they're experiencing new things.

And so the ability to be flexible. And be able to respond to those changes is what's necessary. It's really a corporate philosophy. And when we talk about Six Sigma, actually, I, when I do our overview, and this was something that I learned over time, and backing up for a moment, Miguel, one of the things that as I go through the training, I do my best to make sure that the belts are in training, don't make the mistakes I made.

And then I'm trying to teach things in a way that it makes sense to them. And they know what the best practice is. I always differentiate between this is the right way to do it. Like an ANOVA analysis of regression. This is the right way to do it. There's a certain mathematical sequence you go through and so forth, but some things are best practices.

Some things are my opinion. And I always try to differentiate between that and the training. But when I started first started teaching six Sigma, teach six, six of them [00:15:00] means three different things, at least, if not more and six Sigma being a defect reduction methodology. One, it's the idea that. We can measure a process and understand its variation and begin to explain that in terms of the number of standard deviations that the process mean is away from the standard deviation in terms of number of standard deviation.

That's called the sigma rating of a process with a Z score of a process. Secondly, this idea that we start looking at processes, it's a methodology, which is the DMAIC methodology, but the third, and this is what took me a bit to understand until I got a little bit more seasoned. And it was that, Six Sigma is a management philosophy that defects are not inevitable, right?

Errors in a process are not inevitable. They are fact preventable, but it takes that shift to say, we are no longer going to keep rewarding people for. Firefighting and, temporarily solving problems. We want to reward people for [00:16:00] permanently solving problems and preventing problems in the future.

And so that's a mind shift chain. That's a managerial mind shift change because most organizations reward people for solving problems. We have to shift to where we start rewarding people for preventing problems, making permanent changes to the process.

[00:16:17] **Miguel Rodriguez:** Oh, yeah. The classic being proactive.

[00:16:20] **Jim Athon:** Those terms are so cliché, proactive and reactive. But that's ultimately what we're trying to do. And the way that you do that is you have to have A deep understanding of what causes the problems in the first

place whether it's an excessive cycle time issue, whether it's a defect that occurs, whether it's customer dissatisfaction, we have to understand not the point of where we have the dissatisfaction or the error or the lengthy cycle time, but rather what led up to it, what is the cause and effect if you will, and that's the goal of Lean Sigma is to.

Push to the other side of that equation as to the causes and then control those. And as you said, be proactive as opposed to, Hey, I'm the best reworker in the whole place. [00:17:00] It's that's not something to be proud of, but we should eliminate rework altogether.

[00:17:05] **Miguel Rodriguez:** We shouldn't have a need for a reworker.

That's

[00:17:07] **Jim Athon:** the goal. And I say this in training and I often get quizzical looks at it. I'll say the goal of inspection is to eliminate inspection. Okay. And what that means is everybody has a finite set of problems. And so if we can take and begin to summarize our problems into categories and go categorically, go solve one problem at a time and prevent it from recurring at some point, we'll run out of inspection.

We'll run out of the need for inspection because we've solved all the problems.

[00:17:35] **Miguel Rodriguez:** Just as a quick recap Jim's talking about lean and Six Sigma. And when we talk about those methodologies, lean is to increase Efficiency while Six Sigma is about preventing defects.

Yes. So well said. Yeah. Six Sigma is all about defects and lean is all about cycle time.

That's it. That's it. I always like to come back to that so folks can follow [00:18:00] along. So I'm going to ask this question and I think I'm asking it just because I know it comes up a lot, particularly with even colleagues of mine, because I work in a very conceptual framework, my colleagues and I do.

It's very much not the assembly line or manufacturing. And I know that comes up with a lot of people trying to get their black belts, trying to apply these concepts to non, and you mentioned this at the beginning of the episode where anytime there's a process, this is applicable, but it still can be difficult for people to make The translation, I think.

So I'm going to ask this question. Have you ever had students who are unable to apply black belt concepts in their work?

[00:18:51] **Jim Athon:** That's a loaded question. had people who could not apply. The methodology to the problem that they had at hand, [00:19:00] right? Sometimes we have problems at hand. When we start looking at issues, one of the things about a lean six sigma project is we make, we start with six prerequisites for a project because people have to work a project and going back a little bit further.

I was in the air force for 10 years. And one of the things they taught, especially in tech school is use the right tool for the job. And they called it fit for purpose. So make sure your tool is fit for purpose for the activity you're about to engage in. And the purpose of that is to make sure people aren't trying to use the wrong tool for the job, because sometimes you can cause catastrophic problems doing that, especially when you're dealing with aircraft that carry human beings on boards.

You don't want to do that. What happens is though people will try to take a problem on That is not fit for purpose for the lean six sigma tool set. That's more what I see. So for example, they're trying to design a brand new process and take into account the customer requirements in our own technological limitations.

There is a tool set to do that. It's called the mad be define measure analyze design and verify, and it couples with another tool set called [00:20:00] design for six sigma, but to make is all about an existing process on which we can make incremental improvements. Yeah, when we look at it from that perspective, we talk about the right people, the right process, the right project.

So we've got the right process, which is to make, we've got to make sure we have the right people. You have the right champion. That's another issue that people run into there. They don't have a, they don't have a champion or a manager. That's high enough level. That is interested in solving the problem that they have.

So we got to make sure we have that buy in up front. That's critical. And then we've got the right process, as I mentioned, to make, but then we have to pick the right project. And it meets those six criteria that I mentioned. The two primary ones being, it's an existing process on which we can make incremental improvement.

That is, we're not going to wipe the slate clean and start over. So from that perspective, if we properly screen projects, Then I have not run across a situation where to make was not applicable. It's applicable in every business I've ever been in. I've worked everything from fiberglass to space building [00:21:00] satellites to restaurants even in hotels.

And so it's applicable across the board because everybody has processes. And so this is about process improvement, regardless of what the process is,

[00:21:12] **Miguel Rodriguez:** it's steps on the way to a goal.

[00:21:15] **Jim Athon:** Yes. And the goal being shorten the cycle time or eliminate the customer complaints and or internal errors.

[00:21:20] **Miguel Rodriguez:** And customer can have a variety of definitions in this. Conversation, right? Sure.

[00:21:27] **Jim Athon:** Yeah. It's interesting. We, you bring that up. Customers have two sets of expectations, output expectations, which is the thing they're receiving, whether it's information or a service or an actual product, but they also have service expectations.

How do you go about giving me that product or that service or that information? And a really simple analogy is the old show house, which was about a doctor who was Excellent at diagnosing problems, but he's very abrasive. So in terms of his output, the output expectations of the patient, he was really good at diagnosing, [00:22:00] very difficult to understand diseases, but his bedside manner was horrible.

So his service, his ability to satisfy the service expectations was woefully lacking. So even in a service organization, you have both the output and the service. And so it's understanding what the customer actually wants.

[00:22:14] **Miguel Rodriguez:** Wow. So that, I love that example. I'm not sure if you've given that in our class yet, but that makes it very easy to understand , particularly for anyone who's seen house.

You, since we're talking about DMAIC a little bit divine measure, analyze, improve, and control for anyone who's listening that really is a lot about continuous incremental improvements. I want you to talk about the philosophy of small continuous changes versus pursuing major overhauls.

[00:22:45] **Jim Athon:** when we look at processes, we, one of the things that we do, as far as our screening for what projects what qualifies a project is that you're working at one, one problem at a time. Now that one problem could be a multimillion dollar problem, [00:23:00] or that one problem could be a very small problem.

It just caused minor, perturbations in the process or, dissatisfaction with the customer, but the idea behind it and you would, you'll hear this phrase Taichi Ono said, where there is no standard, there can be no Kaizen. standard means.

Standard work. That means once we learn the best way to do it, we all do it the best way. And if we find a new best way to do it, then we roll that out. And everybody else, everybody now does it the new best way. which is it sometimes can be difficult for us as americans because we're very loss a fair attitude towards addressing things.

We want to do it the way we want to do it. We want to have the flexibility to express our individuality in terms of our personal life. That's excellent in terms of trying to get consistent outcome out of processes, whether it's a call center or whether it's a, a outpatient surgery. Everybody needs to do it the best practice and do it the same way.

So what we'll often do is we'll talk about this idea when he said there can't be no Kaizen. Kaizen means good change. What we don't want is we improve a process, we walk away and it reverts to where it was over [00:24:00] a period of time and then we improve it again and it goes back to where it was. What we have to do is improve it and then consolidate and solidify that improvement through our standard work.

And then we can improve it again and re, redo our standard work to accept the new methodology. And the idea, that's the idea behind continuous improvement. As we improve, standardize, improve, standardize, improve, standardize. Or you could say it, in the other terminology, Kaizen standardized.

And you're constantly going up almost a stair step. If you will. So we don't have to leap tall buildings in a single bound as Superman once was said, being able to do, but rather we're taking stairs and we can get to the top, right? May take a little bit longer, but then again, we don't have to be a superhero.

We can bring everybody along with us.

[00:24:39] **Miguel Rodriguez:** Let's say a process is interdepartmental or even maybe interbusiness and the lack of standardization is probably the key factor I guess I want to iron that out a little bit of how I can standardize something interdepartmentally.

[00:24:59] **Jim Athon:** Okay [00:25:00] before we go there, let's talk about standard work. Standard work is a, it's a process that has been documented and we can train people on what the best way to do a particular task is, and then we compel people to do it that one way that we train them, that's the idea of what standard work is.

I learned this through my consulting career and I came across this, I don't know if you call it a theory or this observation or how you would describe it, but maybe 15 years ago, 20 years ago. That every time I was in a process and I saw that they had problems in the process, it was only one of three causes.

And this is especially defects in the process. It was one of three causes. One, they had no standard works where everybody's doing what they see as fit. Two, we had standard work, but it didn't cover all of the extingencies or it didn't cover every correct, current situation that we can encounter.

Or it was obsolete or some other situation. So we had standard work, but it was bad. But actually the most common that I found is we had standard work and people just, we're not compelling people to follow it. We don't have the [00:26:00] organizational will to do that. So standard work, as we've talked about, it's work that has been standardized to do the best practice.

That everyone should be trained on and everybody should do right so we've there's a building block. I'm giving you, Miguel is this kind of these building blocks we start with standard work. Secondly, people should be trained using the standard work most training in most organizations is OJT watch somebody else do it to you feel comfortable then we'll let you do it to training we don't actually take them to the standard work and teach them the right way to do it and then quiz them on that rather.

You watch somebody else until you feel comfortable and then we'll let you handle the blowtorch too. All right. So while that has it's expedient, it's quick. You can miss a lot of things. But the third element of that is, so we have standard work, we train people according to standard work, and then we hold people accountable.

So you get to this philosophical shift, because that's what you're asking me, how do you shift the philosophy? One key element is the goal and the job of a supervisor, or a team lead, or an area manager, you pick your term, right? [00:27:00] But the goal of a supervisor is not to be the super operator or the super clerk, the super nurse who can come in, solve problems on the fly.

The goal of supervisor should be to make sure people are training standard work and then hold them accountable to doing the standard work. Because if we know the standard work and we do the standard work, we won't have errors in our process. So when you didn't, and there's a lot of, you're hitting on the philosophy of lean Sigma.

The philosophy is every process has a limited number of problems. If we build standard work that addresses all the problems, we shouldn't have those problems anymore. And if we do have the problems, it's either because our standard work has become outdated or people aren't following it. The predominant reason is people aren't following it.

Okay. So we've got to build that understanding. But then when you start talking about solving these problems, you've got to have management commitment. You've got to have management on board to be committed to solving these problems. And what that really means is the person that is responsible for the profit and loss of that area where you're working, the person that's responsible [00:28:00] for the equipment, for the personnel, for the other resources that are there, that person who's responsible managing it should be interested in making it better.

They are the champion. They're the ones who can compel change. If they're not interested in solving the problem, we, that's a bad fit for Lean Six Sigma. They, we need to make sure the champion, the person who owns it. But when you start talking across multiple, departments, Department A and Department B, that means you have to go up a level.

Projects are rarely successful with two champions. Because they it's the three stooges routine. Everybody's pointing fingers at each other. Rather, you need the manager that's above both departments to be taking an interest and realize we need to solve these problems. And so that's really the key to solving those.

So it's a managerial philosophy change. And recognizing that managers that govern interdepartmental relationships need to manage those interdepartmental relationships, because this is an old adage, and you've heard me say it. If you

were in training, our internal [00:29:00] suppliers are always our worst suppliers and our internal customers are always our worst customers.

Everybody else outside of the organization has a profit motive. You get inside the organization. Oftentimes there is no profit motive. And it's routine. I've seen it everywhere. In, in working across multiple industries that internal customers are always worse than internal suppliers are the worst.

[00:29:20] **Miguel Rodriguez:** That, that kind of harkens back to what you were saying about bottom up and top down and the responsibilities of both sides of that coin.

And this could be from either bottom up, maybe a worker wants to try to improve processes in their own work environment. Or maybe it is a manager who wants to try to change the culture of their employees. What is a buy in advice that you could give? Because it does seem very culturally driven.

[00:29:54] **Jim Athon:** It is very culturally driven.

The goal of Lean Six Sigma training, especially as we roll it out, ultimate [00:30:00] goal and let me give you a different perspective. All right. If you look at the in the late nineties, early two thousands, Toyota changed their symbol to these two interleaved ovals. And so if you've seen it on the front of a car, and it's a T it's a shape of a T.

But it also talks about, interrelatedness and it has other meanings, but the, in Toyota, in the fountain, the the guys who builds up the Toyota production system in their own words, the T in Toyota, not only stands for Toyota, it also stands for thinking. And so what that means is as a management philosophy, we have to recognize that our most valuable resource.

And we always say this, everybody says it's a cliché, right? But our most valuable resource are the humans that we have working. They understand and know a lot of things, but unfortunately, A lot of organizations just want people to work and not ask questions and a lot of time it's the insecurity of the manager or it's the way that the organization has been run over a long period of time.[00:31:00]

So we have to, and again cliché words I know, but we have to begin to empower people under their under the supervision of the champion who's over the area we don't want to making changes willy nilly either. Then you're back to laissez faire no standard work. But we want to empower people to start making

incremental changes in their own process, teaching them how do we go about, whether we're using tools like DMAIC or even using more basic tools like an A3, but we're teaching people how to do root cause analysis and solve problems in their own work environment.

But we have to take that and roll it back into standard work. And that means managers have to take the time to nurture that. And so I like to differentiate philosophically. A supervisor's job is to make sure people are following standard work. A manager's job. If you look at a manager, they have a limited number of resources, human equipment, rooms.

Access to utilities, access to other support services. They have a limited amount of resources [00:32:00] and an unlimited number of ways to spend those resources. So the goal of a manager is determined the best way to spend my resources to maximize the productivity of my individual processes, right? Rework doesn't add value.

We recognize that. So how do we work towards never having rework again? We got to solve the original root causes, right? Same with customer satisfaction, same with lengthy cycle time, same with all of it. It really gets back to, it's a management shift in the philosophy of how we're going to utilize the brainpower of our people.

And the fact that's even one of the eight ways not using people's skills effectively.

[00:32:37] **Miguel Rodriguez:** Yes. Yes. Hey your body go do this.

[00:32:41] **Jim Athon:** Yeah, exactly. You've got a pulse Yes, and that's a terrible that's it's a terrible way to Human beings are the most incredible thing in all of creation We are the pinnacle right and we have these incredible insights and skills and knowledge And we teach people don't use them.

And [00:33:00] that's what we're, that's part of philosophy of what we're trying to do is take advantage of those skills and let people express their own intelligence and skill and creativeness in their own workplace to make the processes better. That's ultimately what we're after.

[00:33:11] **Miguel Rodriguez:** Exactly.

[00:33:12] **Jim Athon:** And then you hate to say, again, there's so many cliches that actually have very valid meanings behind them, but we never hear the meaning and the explanation.

We just hear the cliché work hard, work smarter, not harder. Okay. Yeah. Whatever. But what that means is let's figure out how to make our process where it runs as smooth as possible with no errors and no delays.

[00:33:29] **Miguel Rodriguez:** Yes. All right. Let's wrap this up. How can listeners learn more about your classes or the black belt certification? Where can they go to get the certification for themselves?

[00:33:40] **Jim Athon:** Sure. So I would start off at the extended studies website.

And I'm sure you can provide a link to that. We have an excellent resource of Angela Miller. She can help direct you to the right class to go to. But a lot of that is explained very plainly online. We do we're pretty much running a fairly steady pace. Of running a black belt class [00:34:00] every semester.

And it's on pretty much the semester schedule. So we have a fall classes, a winter class and a spring class. People come in with projects. We have a kickoff about two weeks before the beginning of class to make sure they're prepared for their project. They come in with the right project. It's already been properly defined and we hit the ground weren't running in week one.

And at the end of week one, they're actually during week one, they're actually doing actual work on their project as a result of what we've learned in class. And so I would go to the website, I would get in touch with Angela or other resources. They are at the school for, for continuing excellence sign up for a class, get a project, sign up for class, make sure you've got the right champion and they're buying into it and come on board.

We'll have fun.

[00:34:42] **Miguel Rodriguez:** Fantastic.

[00:34:43] **Jim Athon:** Thank you for your time, Miguel.

[00:34:45] **Miguel Rodriguez:** I told you it would be a great conversation. And when have I ever led you astray?

I did promise you some of the information about Process palooza. So head on over to process [00:35:00] palooza.ucsd.edu where you can register. That is taking place on August 6th through seventh of this year,

and it will be taking place right on the beautiful campus in La Jolla, California. Who could say no to that. You will be seeing all kinds of panels and discussions, not to mention all the fun prizes and raffles and food, and really great personalities that you're apt to meet, expand your network, and all that good stuff.

This year's theme is optimizing, transforming, disrupting. So again, this will be talking about process improvement, and again, we'll be focusing on artificial intelligence and how that is changing the world in the lens of enhancement change and innovation.

So we're all very excited. Plus, if I'm not selling it already. You will get to meet [00:36:00] me so how can you not head on over to process palooza.ucsd.edu to register and I'll see you at Dirty Birds for some wings and some pizza and perhaps a drink or two.

Stay tuned for episode two of this very podcast, which will be coming out around mid-April. Again, you can subscribe on SoundCloud or anywhere you get your podcasts, and until then, keep improving.