

# History



By Jean Cunningham

I worked in a wide variety of finance positions for over 20 years. These included CFO, VP of Finance, Plant Controller, Treasury Analyst, etc. Initially these were in corporate-level technology positions, but then, when I became a New Products Manager, I discovered manufacturing, loved it, and have been close to it ever since. Having a varied background in finance while spending a lot of time in manufacturing was invaluable experience, and—I’ve come to realize—fairly unique. This time provided many “Aha” moments and insights that I was not provided in business school and really set up a perfect lean storm for me when I went to Lantech.

[Lantech](#) was just starting their Lean Journey when I arrived there in 1991. It was good timing since Pat Lancaster, Lantech’s founder and a real visionary, was committed to lean manufacturing and fully understood the ongoing gains to be realized if the time and effort was applied to eliminate waste and change the company culture. And, he was smart enough to hire [TBM Consulting](#) to help us. My direct, hands-on participation from the start in the lean manufacturing planning, kaizen events, and other lean manufacturing activities built my lean acumen quickly.

Going forward, I grew to wonder why lean concepts weren’t being applied to areas beyond manufacturing. The more I analyzed it, the more I grew to believe that lean concepts could and should be applied to all parts of a company to eliminate waste and improve the bottom line. In 1992 as CFO, I was able to start creating and implementing lean programs in accounting, human resources, information systems, and elsewhere all with the same dramatic success.

So, over several years with Lantech’s full backing, I used kaizen continuous improvement events and Managing Daily Improvement (MDI) to create lean centric processes within the departments I managed including accounting, IT, and HR. These efforts included a conversion to a lean accounting environment with optimized information systems throughout the company to support lean manufacturing. The kaizen results affected every process and employee in the company and were wonderfully successful for both the employees and the company's bottom line. Once the continuous improvement processes were fully integrated into the departmental culture, ongoing employee-fueled waste reduction gains occurred as a matter of course.

I also used the momentum of this success and my influence to expand lean efforts into the other business process areas including customer engineering, customer service, aftermarket sales, service, and purchasing. In addition, the application of lean principles and insights was a key consideration in acquisition activities I pursued as part of the company’s growth strategy.



Then, through the encouragement of TBM, I wrote my first book, *Real Numbers*, with Orry Fiume. Soon thereafter, I started getting requests large and small for my time to help others do what I had done in my organization. After a few years, this momentum couldn't be avoided and consulting became a full-time profession.

The Shingo research prizes my books won in 2004 and 2008 were a gratifying confirmation from the academic world of what I had learned in the business world. And, more importantly, have helped a wider audience to see the advantages to taking lean beyond manufacturing and creating Lean Business Management organizations.

I believed philosophically in this from the start, but my belief was also tempered by the understanding that it was new and completely out of traditional finance boundaries and foreign to processes in other functions as well. So, I was, and still am, knocked over by the consistent success my clients attain when they start applying Lean Business Management principles in diverse areas all over their companies.

Thanks for considering Jean Cunningham Consulting, and I hope we hear from you.