

-- Speaker 0 00:00:04 Make It Right. The manufacturing podcast,

Speaker 1 00:00:10 Sometimes life brings amazing opportunities that you just don't see. Coming back in 2015, Katie Anderson was running her own lean and leadership coaching business and raising a young family. When her husband was offered an 18 month assignment in Japan, she was up for the challenge. She had no way of knowing that it would lead to a partnership and friendship with Toyota leader, Isao Yoshino, and a new perspective on the role of learning in lean and leadership. Welcome to the makeup ride podcast. This week, we look at the three L's leadership, lean and learning. I'm Janet Eastman and I'm joined by leadership advisor. Kevin Snook. Hi Kevin.

Speaker 2 00:00:49 Hi Janet. I was going to be here

Speaker 1 00:00:50 And we're pleased to have Katie Anderson as our guests. Welcome to make it right, Katie. Good to see you this morning. I know it's really early on the Pacific coast.

Speaker 2 00:00:58 Oh, all great. It's good to be here. Thanks Janet and Kevin.

Speaker 1 00:01:01 So two months ago, you published this book learning to lead, leading to learn lessons from Toyota leader Isao Yoshino on a lifetime of continuous learning. So congratulations on the book. It looks fantastic. All the stuff I've read is great. There it is beautiful. So, um, let's, before we talk about how you actually met him, let's have a little bit of background on you because you have a lot of lean and leadership background, but it really was in the healthcare side of things. Initially.

Speaker 2 00:01:32 Yes, I came, I came into the continuous improvement space, which now I work across Vanda manufacturing, industries, biotech, so many others from a healthcare background. I actually started off my career doing healthcare policy research. I have a master's in public health and I had a career pivot, uh, sort of mid career about, um, a little over about 15 years ago when I realized for me that I love I'm a learner by like the deep in my heart. But what wasn't working for me in academia was that, um, the, there wasn't the things I was impacting. Weren't so tangible. Uh, you know, it was like it was advising for the future or looking back at the past and I really wanted to work more directly with people. So this led me into a path of health care consulting and then working in hospital operations, doing continuous improvement and leadership work, which is where I got introduced to the concepts of lean manufacturing and the Toyota production system.

Speaker 2 00:02:31 And learned my way through how to look at processes from the concept of flow and customer value, and really getting excited about the concepts of how do you develop people? Well improving processes at the same time. And from there moved into more senior leadership roles in healthcare organizations, and then seven years ago started my own consulting practice. And then as you said, just a year after starting my consulting practice, we had this incredible opportunity to move to Japan, uh, for my husband's job, which has now transformed my me personally, and also has given me so much more insight into, uh, leadership and continuous improvement, not just in healthcare, but in manufacturing industries and other industries as well.

Speaker 1 00:03:18 Okay. So like you have a huge varied background. Let's, let's, let's move forward because that was five years ago. You now have like this whole other life where you're, you're doing all kinds of conferences with mr. Yoshino. You've written this book, et cetera. How did you actually meet this man and get this opportunity?

Speaker 2 00:03:39 It was, it was serendipity in terms of our meeting. I was at a conference speaking about six months before we moved to Japan. And mr. Sheena was there as speaking on stage with his former mentor, who was the very first non-Japanese employee of Toyota. And they were on stage talking about their role as manager and director port, and mr. Yoshino said some really powerful things, which has been the framework now of leadership to me, which is a leader's role is to set the direction, provide support, and develop themselves at the same time. But fast forward, we met at the conference. He gave me his card and said, when you moved to Japan, look me up, I'll take you to Toyota city. Um, we'll spend the day together. And at that point I'm like, yes, I'm going to have --

-- an amazing experience, not just personally, but for me professionally. And, uh, you know, when carpet DM, when you have that opportunity to spend time with a sensei, a true leader who leads with the heart and the mind, I made it a priority to jump on that bullet train and get down and visit him in the Goya often. And we developed a really strong friendship from there. So, uh, it was, it was luck and take in seizing the day at the same time.

Speaker 1 00:04:52 So basically, did you actually, did you have an immediate connection to this man where you first met him?

Speaker 2 00:04:58 We did. I mean, I, you know, we, uh, you know, it was a very short, first meeting back in California, but when that very, at that time we met to, to gather in Nagoya and then two in Toyota city, we just had this great experience actually made my husband take the day off of work. So I'm like, this is going to be a once in a lifetime experience. It wasn't, cause now he's like stayed at our house and like, you and I are so close. Um, but yes, and, you know, looking back on it, I th I think that some of those core values that we both have are what caused that synergies. We both have a deep desire for learning and helping other people and for leading international lives that are connected with people around the world. And I think that that just that basic synergy on some fundamentals in our lives, um, transcended gender or race or country of origin, or, um, you know, of all the different things people say, why, how are you guys such good friends, but we really connect on those fundamentals.

Speaker 1 00:05:55 Okay. So how has your leadership perspective changed since you met him and started talking to him about leadership?

Speaker 2 00:06:04 I would say my perspective hasn't changed per se, but more has been enriched and deepened. So things that I knew and had experience in or had the sense of, I now have a much richer, um, depth of knowledge in terms of what it means to be a leader, um, validation that some of the things that I consider important about how you show up to help other people while still retaining your own expertise, his experience over 40 years of Toyota, really validated and confirmed that too. And that we're not perfect and we all have mistakes and failures and how we can really use that as a source of learning.

Speaker 1 00:06:48 Okay. So this is where I really think Kevin, you need to come into this conversation because this is all the stuff that you've been saying all along. So there's a really nice triangle here of conversation.

Speaker 2 00:07:00 You all say the same thing. You mentioned that, and you, you have to remind me again. You said the role of the leader is to set direction, provide support, and develop yourself, develop yourself. Okay. So, yeah, that's fantastic. You know, I, I've been talking about what I call the align process for a long time. And, um, one part of that is aim from the heart. And I want to talk a little bit more about the heart in business as well. But one part is aim from the heart, which is basically my set the direction. And then further down with G is give, help and support. And I quite often say the two key roles for the leader is to set that clear direction and then to be sure that everybody can get that by getting help and support. Can you explain a little bit more or expand a little bit more on that setting the direction?

Speaker 2 00:07:49 Because for me it is aiming from the heart. It's really being passionate about the direction that you're taking the business so that you can inspire other people. Is there anything else that mr. Machina would, would put on that? Yeah. So I want to address that from two angles first, from the business perspective that you, they you've talked about. Yes. Setting, setting that direction is really about having a clear understanding of purpose, uh, and that is connected to the heart and how you're connecting people to that purpose and aligning them. He also talks about setting a challenge that is seemingly impossible, but not one that sets up people for failure, but the challenge is them to go beyond what they thought was possible. And that's where the important part of providing the support is there, you don't just set a challenge and then say, get on you, go for it.

Speaker 2 00:08:39 It's about how you're then setting up the systems, structures and support that enable people to move towards --

-- that challenge. I also, I, I really believe in that leading from the heart and from the heart as well. And there's this concept that I call leading with intention and the word intention has been important to me for a long time. When I moved to Japan, I didn't have business cards. Of course, you know, I, you need it. You definitely need a business card and I didn't have a business logo. So I told the business card company to put the word intention on my card and the concrete characters for intention in Japanese come partially from the word heart and then a symbol meaning direction. And to me, this really means that how do we connect with our heart? What's most important to us, our purpose, and then how do we align our behaviors in that direction, in service of that direction?

Speaker 2 00:09:31 And so the intention is really about leading with the heart and having the actions that will help you get there, both what you need to do as a leader. And also how do you help other people align their actions in that direction as well. And that's just such a beautiful way to put it. And I actually did a, uh, a talk over in Poland and, um, two years ago now, and the whole sort of theme of that was intention and how you want to set intention in everything you do in life. And you're whether you're working out in the morning and in each one of your reps, you want to have a specific intention for what you're trying to do, or whether you're leading the company. And I love the way you put those two together in that intention and the art together, setting that direction with, with passion. Yes, for sure. Absolutely.

Speaker 1 00:10:20 So there's a great quote that I saw in the book where Mr. Yoshino has said, we make people while we make cars. Now he's talking about working at Toyota. He says, it's a culture of respect. So Katie you've been to Toyota. What does that culture look like? What does that respect feel like when you're there?

Speaker 2 00:10:40 So most of my experience of going to Toyota is more as an outsider perspective. So going and taking the leaders from around the world who come to Japan to learn with me on my, um, Japan study trips, uh, and you could observe how people are engaged in problem solving at every level of this, of the manufacturing process. It's amazing watching the production floor. And then my behind the scenes knowledge has really come from talking with Mr. Yoshino for the last six years and understanding how Toyota intentionally develop that culture by putting real effort behind ensuring that their managers at all levels understand what it takes to provide the support to their people. So how do they engage people in problem solving every day, you know, um, from the frontline, but also to the, in the back offices, you know, into middle management as well, where it's so easy to fall into more of a command and control, siloed approach.

Speaker 2 00:11:46 Um, and so it's, it's about the intentionality from leadership to ensuring that there is this chain of learning across the organization as he calls it so that, uh, managers are developing their people and really showing up to ask them for their opinions. And, you know, you go to the frontline, frontline workers put in hundreds of small suggestions, or then you know, every week and you really, they, they talk about with such pride about how those small micro improvements have together created the production line that you now see, when you go there, they're like the real ballet performance.

Speaker 1 00:12:30 So Kevin, this is you talking about the frontline workers being able to say all the way up the line, you know, listen to what this is, because this is a problem for me. If we fix this problem, then we, we can improve everything. So I'm sure you've got a question in here for Katie. So go ahead.

Speaker 3 00:12:48 There's so many that are coming up. I love the fact that you're mentioning the frontline employees, because they say that they're, they're the ones who make the decision every second of the day that determines the success of the business. And, um, and somebody has to be listening to them, right. In order to be able to make that happen. It seems like there's a whole load of, um, consistency and discipline that are required and not disciplined in terms of holding yeah. Disciplining people, but discipline within yourself in order to be able to continuously improve. Why is it that you see some companies --

-- es find that really difficult because there's definitely some blocks in some companies where, um, where that, whether it's consistency, uh, it, it, it just seems much more difficult for them to, to keep going on the journey.

Speaker 2 00:13:40 For sure. You know, I think back to my time in healthcare in particular, where this is where you have, of course, people who are passionate, they're truly there because they care about the product or service the patient, the customer, and everyone's there. They want to do a good job. Um, my experience is that this is where we have this disconnect of intention. You want to help, you want to do a good job, but there's so much sense of urgency or pressure that we need to meet the goal or the outcome without looking at the process, um, or that your everything's a five alarm emergency fire that has to be put out now. And so our habit is then to just jump in and be directive and tell everyone what to do, because it feels easier. And that's what we've sort of been trained to do and rewarded for in our growth as we're growing up and in our adult lives.

Speaker 2 00:14:30 So I think it's my experience. It's less of a desire of not like it's not someone not wanting to help. It's less of that. The more that the, the habits we've created are not aligned in that. And so I like what you said about discipline, where, how do we start slowing down a little bit and how do we start even putting in some structures that help people be more disciplined? It can be as simple as saying, you know, today I want to ask three people, three questions about what they're doing. And then I'm going to reflect at the end of the day on how I did that and start building little habits. Um, but using the structure to really create those habits and also declare your intention and then have some, have some accountability both to yourself and others, Kevin.

Speaker 3 00:15:21 Yeah. Yeah. I'm going on and off mute with that, that whole idea around, um, getting the people individually involved in things, and then having the kaizens from, from everybody. Um, you need to have a structure that is willing to listen to them and also be able to say, um, no at times, right? Because you can be overloaded with great suggestions. Some of them are not going to meet the, you know, the top level of priority at this point, maybe later on, um, is there, is there a technique or a tactic for saying, no, you know, thank you for the suggestion, but no, we're not going to pursue that.

Speaker 2 00:15:59 One thing that I saw work really effectively. And again, this is a healthcare example, but you could use this in any, any industry was that when a group was starting to try and bring forward more ideas from the front line, like those simple suggestions even have a visibility wall and also have some criteria that the group is, is aware of. And even perhaps had some input in developing, and then there could be even, you know, there are some criteria I know this is not something at all we're going to work right now. And then there is the, you know, the, the leader, the manager can review each of the items with the team at a certain time of the, of the week. And the team has some opportunity to help prioritize or yes, that's easy, or the person takes it forward to move it forward, um, or agreed.

Speaker 2 00:16:47 Like, that's a great idea, but there's this more complexity to, to, in to putting that, making that happen. So using a visible war board in also having clear criteria and engaging the people themselves to help prioritize maybe which ones we would do first, and it all gets back to engagement and people not feeling like things are happening behind closed doors or that yeah. You asked for our ideas, but you're not doing anything with them. And so how, how do people see that their opinions matter? Even their opinion on what to say no to, I think it's really interesting when I was reading in the book. There's this culture of, um, it's not a culture of failure. It's a culture of accepting failure because you have to try stuff, you have to try stuff and it's okay to fail because eventually we're going to figure out what makes this work properly, but what's it like, or what have you learned about working with that culture of failure and where it can take you?

Speaker 2 00:17:47 Yeah, so I it's, it's pretty special to hear mr. Yoshino stories, uh, particularly he had these two very different, excu --

-- see me, two very different failures. One that that book ended his career one when he was 22 and he was a new, uh, employee of Toyota. And he had this big mistake. He, he was assigned to the, for the shop floor, uh, as, even though he was a back office worker, they wanted him to get experience of the true value creation of the company. So for two months he was assigned to the manufacturing floor and his job was just the pour, the paint and the solvent into a tank that was going to paint the cars. And one day the, the shop floor manager ran up to the paint shop and said, the paint is not sticking to the cars. And it turned out that he had done something wrong in his pouring of the paint and the solvent, but instead of yelling at him, you know, he was worried.

Speaker 2 00:18:41 He just started at Toyota and he's 22 years old. But instead of yelling at him, the paint shop manager said, thank you for making that mistake. We are, sorry. We did not set up the conditions for you to be successful at work because they realized they hadn't labeled the paint cans in a very clear way to make it easy for him to do the right thing. I mean, what an amazing first experience. And, and he said that that similar thing happened to other new hires who are like making mistakes on the shop floor, as they were learning things, the managers would say, thank you for making that mistake. Now we see that there's an opportunity for improvement. And my mind was blown away when I first heard that story and he was laughing. He hadn't thought heard of it in years, but it set him on a certain trajectory who knew the kind of leader.

Speaker 2 00:19:32 He wanted to be someone who had that response. But I think back my experiences in almost any company or industry that I've been in, how that, that response would not have been the typical sort of first response by anyone we're sort of, we're habituated to blame the person and kind of be angry rather than truly, uh, maybe there was an initial first response of Ugh, but like coming forward and thanking someone for making the mistake and taking ownership for that. And then you fast forward 40 years, mr. Yoshino was responsible for a multi-million dollar new business venture, um, Toyota's water ski boat business in the United States, which very few people know about because it was a failure. It was a, the Alexis grade water boat. And it failed for many reasons, but mr was mr. Yoshino, his idea, and he was in charge of production.

Speaker 2 00:20:22 And, uh, he was, you know, he was, uh, it was a pretty hard thing for him, uh, to have this significant failure, but even so mr. Cho Fujimoto, who was then the president of Toyota told him, you know, it's okay that you failed. We had a responsibility part, you know, we were new to the boat business. You were new to the boat business. And there's things we've all learned about how, how to do this. And he was reassigned to another, when he was at the end of his career, he was a pro, he was at his retirement, but he still had a few more years that he wanted to work and he was given another pretty amazing opportunity. And so again, it was leadership's response to those like failures or mistakes that really, I think, say so much about the Toyota's culture of learning and respect for people.

Speaker 2 00:21:10 And so I think about for ourselves, how can we bring forward even a small part of that to our companies and, and, and how much that is really going to accelerate. People's willingness to innovate, uh, create new ideas like this water ski boat business, because he wasn't blamed or kicked out of the company for, for having failure or even something as small as making a, you know, a pretty big mistake, like the, the paint, but what that means for people's willingness for how they show up, um, their creativity and just feeling that they're part of a company that truly cares. And as you said, Kevin leads with the heart, um, as well, I'm really interested in your perspective, Kevin, and what you've seen in organizations as well. Now that you said that beautifully. And I know I was working with a company just today, um, and everything's virtual at the moment, right?

Speaker 2 00:22:04 Because we can't get around and visit people so much. And so I was working with a company today, we've got nine people on a zoom call. And, uh, what I realized during the conversation that I let them know this was the way that people were listening. It --

-- was almost like they were creating a vacuum for my ideas to be able to be put in that, you know, sometimes when you have ideas and you feel like you're hitting a wall, this wasn't just that they were being absorbed. It was almost like they were being pulled into a vacuum. And I think that that part of the culture that you're talking about being created going in with a problem, and rather than just a well, you know, kind of it's okay, you know, not beating up on them, but actually pulling that out and say, no, it's fantastic that you've made that you've made a decision it's gone wrong and now we can all learn from it and move forward. That is such a beautiful, that was the only way I could think of it today. And, uh, I love that idea that you're actually pulling ideas out of people and you're giving them the confidence to be themselves and actually come up with it's a lovely way to put it.

Speaker 1 00:23:09 Hmm. I thought it was really interesting, um, that we talked last week with a gentleman by the name of Peter Gibbons. He's the CEO at tire hub and he talked about failure and he said, there is no, it's all just information. And without the information, you can't make improvements. So if you're having a failure, tell us about it because it's just information. We're not going to get angry. We need that information in order to improve.

Speaker 2 00:23:38 Yes, mr. US-China talks about, uh, he calls it bad news first. Uh, and how, how can you lead as leader with asking for bad news first? And it's great. You want to hear in good news cause you want to celebrate it, but your role as leaders to help respond to bad news and not come in in a punitive way, but come in with that support. And, you know, it was the same thing. He, you know, mr. Yoshino knew his business was failing and he asked mr. Cho to come out and visit. And he did, he made, uh, made it all the way out to Florida, which was not easy for him. And so what's our response as a leader, but for any, you know, it's the concept of pulling the, and on Kevin getting back to that frontline, something that's so different. Um, was it different at Toyota, many companies now have this approaches, how can workers know the clear expectations of what they need to get done in a short period of time?

Speaker 2 00:24:29 And if they're not able to do that, how do they signal for help and that they actually receive help, um, to, to solve problems. So if they can't immediately solve that problem, how do they get their team leader to come and help them? And if the team leader can't help them in a certain period of time, how did they, they pull a cord or signal a light and the group leader comes out and helps them. And that's what I think is, you know, going back to what I've observed at Toyota, it's amazing. You see those lights going off all the time, because people are signaling, there's a mistake, there's a problem, there's an issue, but it's because there's help and they've, they're asking for help and they're receiving help. And so what a powerful transformative experience, if we can have more of that in our organizations as well, Kevin you're nodding. Yeah,

Speaker 3 00:25:16 Yeah. That, that the ability to ask for help, but also the, having the receptiveness to the help, you know, having people listening, we talked a lot on this podcast, Janet, about listening and how important that is as a leadership trait. Um, but listening with, with a real intent to help. And, you know, it comes back to your intention again, right. It's really, I have an intent to help. I really am desperate for the organization to move forward. Um, I know with, with such a lovely book, um, I'm wondering how the, how writing the book has transformed you individually. Because what I found was that I see trying to try to simplify things into the format of a book, and I see that process. You you're, you're serving something up, but I found that I was learning a huge amount myself and I was wondering, how do you feel that, uh, this, I believe this is your first book, how do you feel that that has itself that writing processes transforming?

Speaker 2 00:26:13 Absolutely. You know, I think back to Janet's question too, of what have I learned from a leadership perspective. And I think it all goes back to the Cynthia having to synthesize information. I mean, so yes, it's great to have this book, but the amount of effort that went into that from my brain's perspective, it --

-- 's not like mr. Yoshino stories came out in this like clean narrative that shows up in the book. These are years of interviews and me piecing together things. Uh, and I actually required me to pivot as well. I had this initial framework of that. I was going to write a book under with topics of like maybe the 10 leadership lessons and tell stories in there. And as I sat down to write, I was getting really stuck. And I was like, ah, this isn't working. And I realized the narrative of his story needed to be told through his arc of his true learning journey in a chronological way, but in a way that still provided structure for the reader to sort of anchor on some key concepts.

Speaker 2 00:27:10 And so it was a real, uh, intellectual challenge for me to think about how to process all of this information and where did I need to go deeper? Where was it okay to have just a little bit? And so I, I really learned about, um, it made me reflect about what did I believe was, were sort of the key points, uh, in also what did, what did I think about, you know, what, or what, how much did we need to tell how much more did I need to go back to mr. Yoshino and really dive deeper? Um, you know, for example, end that's water, ski boat, uh, business. He always talked about it, but didn't go deep into it. But as I started writing, I'm like, I don't understand what's going on. And so for the course of the year, I just kept asking him more questions.

Speaker 2 00:28:03 And in fact, even up until right before we hit publish, there were some new elements coming out because all of a sudden he had this experience of being able to unleash sort of the repressed challenges for him, or he was he'd felt battle about it for many years. And he, all of a sudden was remembering more things are more willing to talk about it. And so I also had to say a certain point, like you're all, you're all the time out. You're always going to be learning and thinking about things in a new perspective. I think that's also a challenge of putting, letting the book be a moment in time in my thinking and my processing. Um, but the process of writing and I find this with writing my blog as well. It is forced reflection time, and we all go through our lives so quickly and writing really requires you to sit down and think and process. And there's something really powerful about that forced time, um, to, to do so. So, um, it was, but it's a, there's a lot more effort as you know, Kevin that goes into writing a book than what the final product is.

Speaker 3 00:29:10 I think w what you were just talking about then is really comes down to storytelling. When you use the machine, though, you were digging and digging and digging to figure out what was that real transition point that he had, when was it and what was specifically happening? And that's the beauty of storytelling that you pulled out so well in the book.

Speaker 2 00:29:28 Thank you. And, and also, I, I realized stories are so much more powerful than, you know, I could sit there and be like, it's important to listen to your people, but no, like, why don't I tell a story about that then ask you some questions about, well, what did you learn from this? How often do you listen? What is it like when leaders don't listen to you? And that's a much more enriching and engaged experience than just being told, um, what a leader should do.

Speaker 1 00:29:55 We have one last question, because we're running out of time, Katie, but I wanted some final key takeaways that you would like to share from your entire experience. I don't care what it is, but what would you share with leaders right now based on all of your experiences in the last five years?

Speaker 2 00:30:11 Yeah. Great. It's all, it all goes back to that concept of intention and really connecting with, what is your purpose as a leader what's most important and creating self-awareness for yourself about where are those times that you're really your strengths. You are really aligned with achieving that purpose. And then where are the times that your habits are more limiting? You know, Kevin mentioned some of those, maybe not listening as effectively. And so what does that mean? What does listening more effectively look like? How are you going to change that? How can you ask more questions? What are the things you need to do, and how can you create those habits, um, to be aligned in that direction? And so that's the whole deve --

-- lop yourself as well. And I think if we can get back to, uh, a habit of setting some intention every morning, about how not, or just, what are we going to accomplish our goals, but what's our intention for being sort of who do we want to be as people and leaders? What are the things that we're going to do to, um, demonstrate that, and then have some time for reflection, even if it's five minutes at the end of the day, about how effective was I that and what I need to change. And that's the true plan, do study, adjust cycle. Okay.

Speaker 1 00:31:17 Katie, thank you so much for talking to us today and good luck with the book,

Speaker 2 00:31:23 Much, play it and learn as much as I have from working with mr. Yoshino.

Speaker 1 00:31:29 Yeah. Like it's only been out two months, it's available on Amazon so people can check it out. You're also doing a keynote. Um, you and mr. Yoshino are the speakers at the AME Toronto 2020 virtual conference, which is a Wednesday, October 28th, from 10 till 11:00 AM. So if people want to check that out, we're going to put that link on the website so they can go in and watch the conference. So thanks again. And good luck to you. Thank

Speaker 2 00:31:53 You so much, Janet and Kevin, it's been a pleasure.

Speaker 1 00:31:55 So that's our show this week, please check out our Twitter and LinkedIn feeds that are on our podcast page and subscribe and share the podcast with your friends and colleagues. We're on iTunes, Google play, Stitcher, Spotify, and YouTube, and Kevin's book Make It Right: Five steps to align your manufacturing business from the front line to the bottom line is available on Amazon as is Katie's book. So you can check it out. It's called learning to lead, leading to learn. And thanks a lot for joining us this week for Make It Right.

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