



Transcript for the WLEI Podcast:

On the Job: with Ron Kelner, President and COO of the Deublin Company

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Featuring: Josh Howell and Ron Kelner

Josh: Thanks for joining us just in a couple of months at the Lean Summit on Carlsbad, in April.

Ron: Yeah, we're looking forward to it. I think it's a great opportunity for Deublin to share our story, and maybe be helpful to those that participate in the summit.

Josh: Perfect. Well, so speaking of Deublin, and I guess speaking of you Ron, maybe you could kind of briefly introduce yourself, and tell us a little bit about the company, about Deublin?

Ron: Sure. Well, I've been with Deublin company 18 years now, and came to them from an aerospace manufacturing company, which was publicly traded, and prior to that, I was in the primary red metals business. So think of the steel mill, except we were in the brass and copper primary production. When I joined, Deublin was extremely successful. It was a transition from retiring management, to my joining the company. So it was not a case of a turnaround or anything like that, the company was growing and expanding like everyone else coming out of 1999 and 2000, they had had a little bit of a setback, but were seemingly back on track in early 2003 when I joined Deublin company. For those that don't know, we manufacture rotating unions and slip rings, and most people, I'm certain don't know what a rotating union is.

Josh: I will count myself among those.

Ron: Yeah, my family members as well. If you think about a manufacturing process where you're delivering any kind of media, whether that be air, gas, steam, water, coolant, into a rotational process, you can't hook the hose to it. Obviously, the hose would twist up. Deublin creates that coupling. The one side is stationary with the hose delivering whatever the media is, to the rotating portion attached to the machine, and it's a small product that's critical to all production processes.

Ron: So whether it's a wind turbines on the highway, controlling the pitch of the blades, cooling the rolls in a steel mill, or polishing the glass on your mobile device. It's used just about in every manufacturing process, so a small maintenance product used in virtually every industry. We have five manufacturing facilities, the US headquarters just North of Chicago, as you mentioned in Waukegan, Illinois. We have two plants in Europe, one in, just outside Frankfurt, and one in Bologna, Italy. Then in Asia, we have one

manufacturing plant in DaLian, China, and a smaller manufacturing facility in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Supporting a number of sales offices around the globe, so that's kind of Deublin in a thumbnails.

Josh: Okay. You have responsibility for Deublin globally. So I guess traveling to these various sites around the world, and supporting those teams in those locations.

Ron: Absolutely.

Josh: Excellent. So here we are, on the WLEI Podcast, the official podcast of the Lean Enterprise Institute. So presumably we are going to talk about Lean Thinking at Deublin. It's kind of the reason for our conversation.

Ron: I hope so.

Josh: So, why don't you tell us about what's been happening with Lean Thinking at Deublin, sort of, when was the company introduced to it, or you, when were you introduced to it? What was the reason that it was an attractive sort of business mindset, business thinking way, and so on?

Ron: Yeah, I'm happy to.

Josh: Cool.

Ron: I'm happy to, it's kind of an interesting transition because in many cases when you hear about companies with their Lean Journeys and this includes Toyota, they're in desperate straits that forced them to say, "We have to look at our business totally differently." As I mentioned in my overview on Deublin company, it was a very successful company, really from its founding, moving forward in 1945, all the way up to when I joined. As a privately held company, we were very paternalistic. We took a great deal of pride in our long-term employees, and we have excellent employees, no question about that. But one of the things that was an observation to me, was that we were very people dependent, in our processes. In other words, if we had to make a critical part, oftentimes we would wait for whomever, Josh, Dwayne, Bob, Sally, Susie, to be there to do that production because they were quote-unquote, "the experts."

Josh: They know how to do it, nobody else did, and people were pretty dependent on that expertise.

Ron: Exactly. Honestly that was wonderful as the company grew to a certain size. When I joined, and I had had a little bit of background through the '80s, '90s, on the whole quality system movement. So as the advent of the ISO certifications, and the various automotive qualifications, I certainly saw the benefit of a quality system that linked the processes together more in line with how the customer saw it.

Ron: During my early years of 2002 to 2008, we really started down the quality system path. We started looking at ways to continue to support our growth, and we went down the

path of automation, right? We couldn't make enough parts, and we were buying machines virtually every year to add to our capacity.

Josh: Had that been a practice that preceded you joining or, or this was something you were kind of introducing as the ...

Ron: The automation really came with me because one of the issues I recognized, and I shared with the board of directors, we had a maturing workforce, and we needed to figure out a way to make a transition where we could increase the productivity of the company, without being dependent upon people that were retiring at an accelerating rate.

Josh: Okay. So one way to deal with that would be to rely more on machines, than on those people, those experts, as you said.

Ron: Well, that was the early thinking, and in 2008, this was before the crisis that crippled the world in the fall of 2008. In the spring of '08, we had had some events where we had created unmanned production, that we could run X thousand pieces over a course of a week. Without fail, we'd come in on Monday morning, and we'd find 4 or 500 pieces that were either bad, or requiring rework, because the machine, the tool broke, whatever the issue might have been. That was pretty apparent to me that no matter what the quality system looked like, or how effective the automation, or the QC inspection processes were, it wasn't working.

Ron: So that was really when I started trying to figure out different paths, and I had the opportunity to read [The Toyota Way](#), and there were a few things that really struck me about that, because again we were a successful company that had a very high degree of organizational trust, high degree of comradery amongst the organization. I was always concerned that I didn't want to disrupt the culture, and the more I started to learn about TPS, and the base philosophies of TPS, I thought this could have application for Deublin Company.

Josh: That's really interesting. I had kind of a similar experience where it was around the same time working for Starbucks then, but also a culture that had been even memorialized in books, and articles about the company that was really good. People thought quite a bit about their culture, and had a similar, I guess belief, when we were exposed to TPS, to Lean Thinking, that it seemed consistent with the good culture that we had already. Also, had some promise to help us with some of the problems that we were facing, again at that time, 2008, almost the exact same timeframe.

Ron: Right. Huh? It was a case where, we have conscientious employees, and we have a high degree of just what I call organizational trust. The management trusts the employees to try and do the right thing and vice versa. The employees are counting on the management to be doing the right thing. So I was very conscious about jeopardizing that, and we've all seen it where you chase the flavor of the month for some panacea, and I didn't want to go down that path. So I exposed my management team, which was at the time probably about eight people, to the book, gave them two or three weeks to

read it, and I said, "If you don't read it, here it is on CD, listen to it in your car, and your back and forth to work-"

Josh: CD? That's perfect.

Ron: Right out of the past, starting to date myself. But anyway-

Josh: It was only 2008.

Ron: I know.

Josh: That's pretty-

Ron: That's a long time ago in some people's mind. But it was one of those things again where I needed to make sure that the team understood if we started down this path, we didn't really want to deviate from it. They came back, we had a positive conversation, and we really started to target a small group, we brought in probably eight to 10 people, not necessarily in a job function that was tied to any activity on the shop floor. I remember we brought in one young lady out of accounting and what we were really looking for were people that were willing to say "We can do it differently." The thing that we didn't want to say was, "Oh, we've tried that before."

Josh: Sure.

Ron: So we were looking for more open minded than we were, technically knowledgeable.

Josh: But were these eight to 10 people connected in any way? So you've got the girl from accounting, the other, whatever, seven or nine people-

Ron: Well, we were all based in Waukegan, right? When they came in, we kind of introduced the idea, and not everybody was from outside departments, we took people directly from machining, directly from assembly, and of course I had the whole manufacturing organizational chain involved. I will come back to that, those people probably had the hardest stretch. So there was a couple of us that, I hate to say at the top, that were driving this, and the people on the shop floor were very receptive. The change really was difficult in that area, connecting those two extremes.

Josh: Sort of the middle there. What was your role at the time?

Ron: I was President, Chief Operating Officer.

Josh: You were President. CEO then. Okay.

Ron: Yeah. Yep. But anyway to boil it down. We really started in with the basic tools of Lean Thinking. We wanted to make the demand visible, we wanted to drive towards one piece flow. Mind you, this is right on the tails of me buying automation to make thousands of pieces, now I'm starting to talk about one piece flow. That was a

challenging period for us, but the people, honestly everyone engaged, and we used the philosophy of let's run an experiment. Because there were plenty of times people would come to me saying, "Ah, you know we're ruining whatever we're doing." We adopted for whatever reason, it felt nonthreatening to say, "Let's run an experiment." If no one's going to get hurt, the building doesn't burn down, there's virtually nothing we can't reverse in a week or two.

Josh: So that was, I'm curious, but can I interrogate that just quickly? So the, that kind of phrase, "Let's run an experiment," or even just the concept of experimentation. So with Deublin, that concept was a part of this practice, from the beginning, from 2008?

Ron: Yes. I will tell you why, because we were very focused on this not being, if you will, a Japanese system. There was a concern ... We wanted it to very much be our system, very localized. We avoided the use of the very typical Japanese terms, now we're much more comfortable with it today, 10 years, 11 years down the road. But at the time it was more about making the people comfortable, than introducing Genchi Genbutsu or Kaizen or you pick it. It just seemed to add one more complexity that we didn't need to do.

Josh: So there's the existing culture you mentioned that was good, and healthy, and from your standpoint, didn't want to do anything to disrupt it. There were some issues so that move to automation, the fact that automation was being applied to sort of a big batch production approach, and the corresponding defects. So I'm sure there was some frustration that folks felt when they would come in Monday morning, find all these defective parts. With the, I guess, group sort of recognizing that there were some problems to solve, with a good organizational culture, with, as you said, trust between management and frontline folks, and a desire to both learn something new, but not be disruptive.

Josh: That sort of concept of experimentation versus an implementation, right? So here's this system from somewhere else, Japan, I guess in this case, and what we're not trying to do is just implement that thing, but to experiment with it, to explore how it might work here, we have problems, right? No disagreement there. Also, we have a lot to be proud of, and so how do we kind of, I guess recognize both of those things? That's just an interesting thing, the reason I asked about it is, I was having a conversation with someone who's also been sort of a part of the Lean community, a Lean practitioner for a long time, probably longer than you and I, if both of us were introduced to Lean around the same time, actually 2008.

Josh: This guy was maybe 20 years or something, and he mentioned a turning point for him in his own kind of thinking in practice was, being introduced to the concept of experimentation versus implementation. So here is this quote-unquote "Best practice from somewhere, and I'm just going to implement it here." That had, I think been really, the mindset that he had had with applying Lean Thinking, and trying to get other folks to apply it too, up until a certain point. Then I think he actually credits Jim Womack in a presentation using that concept, that the concept of experimentation.

Ron: We very well could have at the time, but one of the things that, well, couple of things, you said we had problems, we did. We had two different problems. We had growing inventory with poor service level, which was really, the banner we built our communication to all of the employees around, because they could see it, they could understand that. At the board level, the conversation was, we have a maturing workforce that at any given day, and up until the fall of '08, the stock markets were rising, and people were looking at retirement. So at any given day, we could have a significant brain drain organizationally for the company. So when we talked about experiment, it diffused the feeling for the supervisors were doing it wrong, that all the way up through the Vice President Manufacturing, who had been here at that time, 35 years, we didn't want to say you're doing it wrong, right? Which is, if we come in and do quote-unquote, "Best practices," does that mean your practice wasn't best?

Josh: Totally. That's right.

Ron: The other portion of it was, experiments have an implication of an end date. We're going to run an experiment, so it's not permanent. We're not coming in to change your world forever. Typically, and I would say 99.9% of the time, the experiment was successful to some degree of closing our gap to Target Condition, and therefore whatever it was we were experimenting on, was embraced and then we moved on to the next phase.

Ron: But a lot of the early days was really to create a non-threatening, and then also we were migrating from a very directive management style. I'd been with the company X number of years, I know how to do this job, do it as I tell you. That's not consistent with the idea of putting in a Lean process, and really hearing what the problems were. I'll go off on a tangent and funny little story, we had a Lean coach come in and we stood around the new cells. One thing we were, we were active. So if we were introduced to an idea, by golly we're going to implement the idea, much to our default or to our own detriment.

Ron: But we stood around this brand new cell that we'd built, and we way overpaid for it, and it was all custom aluminum extrusions. It was beautiful, and we stood there waiting for whatever you want to call it, the teacher, the parent, the leader, to guide us, and say, "Good boy." They walked in, and they grabbed a part, and they held it up and said, "Why bad part?" Walked on. Well, at that point in time, I honestly thought our VP of Manufacturing might come to workplace violence. But in hindsight, looking back, the message there was, uncover problems, look for problems, don't look for what you're doing right. Now I will tell you, it took us years to grasp that, I can laugh about it now, but I remember it like it was yesterday. That was again part of that evolution of culture and learning.

Josh: Mm-hmm(affirmative). I had a really similar experience once I, so I think I've shared with you a little bit about my background. Some people may know, but I was introduced to Lean Thinking, I was a store manager for Starbucks, and coffee shops have in the morning, a peak period, right? Where most of the customers come in, obviously on their way to work or whatever to get started for the day with a cup of coffee, and my store, we would run with four, it was kind of a busy store. We'd run with four baristas in the morning, is what we needed to handle that volume. So the team and I had done some

work, it's a little bit of a different story, but similar kind of coaching moment I guess, which is why I'm going to share it. The team and I had, we had done a lot of improvement, a lot of Kaizen, figuring out how to really effectively operate during that peak period, with our, that the number of customers that were coming in, and the drinks that they were ordering, so on and so forth.

Josh: We had a visitor, a Lean coach, maybe the same one, who knows? Who I was really proud of, what improvements we had made, and that with this four-person crew we had figured out a lot of things. So they came, visited and observed, and it was a fairly smooth running day, things kind of went well and some of the changes that we had made, were I guess on display as good, and so that the busy period ends, I go to this coach looking for an attaboy, maybe similar to you guys, and all I got was, "What would it look like with three?"

Ron: Exactly. That's, and it's an interesting thing because, that was, and I didn't understand it at the time, I'll be honest. But in reflection of it, that was where the focus was, on the thinking, not on the tool. We had built the tool, the cell.

Josh: Sure.

Ron: What did we learn from that? There's a reason you use duct tape and cardboard the first time, because I bet we modified the cells, on a fairly regular basis. The other thing that we ran into, which again I apologize for getting a broccoli patch, but, in the Kanban, we wanted to create this pull system. Well, we wanted very specialized kinds of racks, and so we went out and built or bought, I won't say custom, but they were not cheap. We thought it was perfect. Well, now if you came in to Deublin, you'd see every rack is on wheels, because they stay in the same spot about a week, and then we decide on a better way to go after it. But that for me now in hindsight, was the first time we really changed our thinking versus just execution of a machine or a tool. You have to remember, we were buying machines because machines got the work done, right? So if you build a cell, conceptually it's our machine to get the work done-

Josh: Different kind of machine, yeah.

Ron: But the reality was, what we were really trying to build was the thinking, and we've done better at that in the recent years than we did in those early days.

Josh: So recognizing that, okay, that tool, the machine to use that word is an important part, and the benefits of pull, the benefits of one by one, the benefits of a cell are sort of known, right? I mean just in ending up themselves, there is benefit. But in addition to that, in addition to sort of the result I guess that you might get from implementing that tool, from using that net quote-unquote, "Machine," there's maybe an intangible benefit that we can come to if we sort of build those things with flexibility, and that's the benefit I guess for the learning that can happen, and the continual change through experimentation to return to that word, unless we don't set ourselves up for that, unless we get these really expensive versions of the cell, or the rack, or whatever, in

which case that flexibility is not there. So the intangible benefit of learning, and I guess the development that a team member might get, wouldn't be available either.

Ron: Yeah. I think, I completely agree with you. The problem I had had, we Deublin had, was really getting to that transitional moment, right? Because we were making progress, and again, we weren't in a dire straits. We were a successful company. So trying to figure out the silver bullet, right? We were looking for the special solution, and it took probably from 2008, and we did a lot of training during the '09 crisis, and that was, honestly it was a horrible time from a business standpoint, but from a culture for change and education standpoint, it was a perfect time for us to get a little breathing room, to run more experiments, learn a little bit deeper what the real meaning was behind some of these things.

Ron: But, we backed away, and if you looked at it kind of a series of events, whether it was the building of that first cell, and the coach telling us to focus on problems, to building all of the racks, and then realizing, and we built those racks with the idea that we were going to have this six bin system, which was a totally arbitrary decision. But it was in order for people not to think that this was an inventory play. This was really a service performance play. I'll tell you, it took us forever to break the idea that if we had to have six bins, and six bins was, there was no science behind six bins.

Ron: But all of those small things really led to, I guess for us the discovery that we needed to create a problem solving methodology, and a thinking, because while we were growing, we were growing at, and I mean growing in our Lean Thinking. We were growing at a relatively slow rate, because we were kind of waiting for each tool to mature, and progress us. At one point I was having some conversations, and the feedback came back to me that, and this is one of the things that we'll share in the summit, your progress is directly tied to your ability to problem solve. The number of problems you solve, and how effectively you solve those problems. I have to tell you if there was one moment that I walked away and said, that that changed us from what we've referred to as DPS, Deublin Performance System. That was the day it became a performance system, in my mind. It was great before, and we were doing a lot of good things, but that really transitioned us-

Josh: To performance, I guess in this case. The performance of, I think as you said, problem solving, both in terms of quantity and quality.

Ron: Yes. But, it was, we moved from that's a production tool to this is a business tool, and it opened us up, as I would tell you today, and I will highlight more detail during the summit. The two areas where I spent the bulk of my time are problem solving, and human development, because they're directly tied, and the better our employees get at the problem solving, it just kind of unleashes the real power of the tools. But I will say that, it sounds easy and right, and everybody's got a form to problem solve. But going from that broad vague, to a specific problem, is a challenge, for everyone, and maybe worse for more the management team, because they like to think big, and if we're learning that problems are solved one by one at a very, very small level.

Josh: One of another things, so, I guess if I haven't mentioned it already, I can mention it now, that I had the opportunity along with one of my colleagues here at LEI, to visit Deublin, there in Waukegan, a number of months ago. You just sort of mentioned the idea of Lean becoming, I guess evolving to the Deublin performance system, and expanding in a, to use that word I guess, into a business system for Deublin, not just a production system, I guess they're on the shop floor. That was one of the things that I really appreciated about, the time that I, that about the visit there was that, of course we had the chance to go and see, to spend time with the quote-unquote "Gemba." We started there on the shop floor, that was wonderful. I got to see the flexible cells that we're referring to now. Did not see, I think we've actually, we found one bad part, we were walking around if I'm not mistaken-

Ron: I'm sorry.

Josh: There was a response to that, which was, I got to see of course. Not a batch of bad parts, I guess I should ...

Ron: No. Hopefully those days are behind us.

Josh: That's right. But beyond that, we visited other areas too. We got to visit areas that are responsible for product development. We didn't get to visit the sales team scattered across the globe, but we got to interact with some of the folks that are a part of the sales team. One thing that I remember taking away from the visit was, what was that fact that really Lean Thinking at Deublin, has become a very widespread, and sort of definitive to the business system there at the company. So how did that, I guess, transition happen? What was it about? Where it started, and that experience?

Ron: We don't have enough time on the podcast to cover all of it. Because it's one of those things that it, rarely can you really say it was one event or one or two or three events. It was a slow creeping glacier of the change in our thinking. We got better at the way we looked at the business news. Interesting management historically, and I think management just in general tends to sweep the problems under the rug for the next, for their boss coming in the room. We didn't have a good focus on problems, we focused on positives, and we had lots of positives, that was good. But the fact of the matter is, we also had lots of problems, and as we became more of a problem solving culture, making problems visible was not a concern, a fear of the employees, whatever, it was never, it wasn't a problem.

Ron: Let's talk about what's inhibiting us from going from current condition to target condition. All of a sudden it changes from, "Ron, you're doing a bad job, right? You're the bad employee. Otherwise, everything would be perfect too." We have a process related problem. So those small evolutions that took place really started to lay the groundwork for this to be a human development system, because now as I stand with an employee, and we're looking at a process problem, it's not that employee in trouble. It's that employee sharing their views of what the problem is, current condition, and maybe some countermeasures that they're contemplating. That thinking has unleashed for us really what we were referring to as our human development process. We use it in

our recruiting, we use it in all of our training, and we've spread that throughout the organization.

Ron: So coming back to your comments about seeing it in various areas, once you're able to say, "We have problems," now all the sudden, tools that are available, whether it's A3s or simple problem worksheets, but we adopted A3s all the way from the top. We do our annual plan on an A3, that breaks down gap to target, on what we consider are the three to five strategic things we want to get done in the year. Those three to five things then break down into various departmental A3s, and it flows all the way down through the whole sales organization worldwide, the engineering organization worldwide, marketing worldwide. Those A3s eventually flow into the shop floor, FMDS process. So-

Josh: FMDS, what does FMDS stand for?

Ron: Floor Management Development System, and that development is a-

Josh: Key word.

Ron: Key component to that acronym. Every year, we've been doing this now, the A3 top level strategic plan, we're probably on about our fifth year of. Every year, we get incrementally better at the way we look at it, we try and make the top level A3 thinking breakthrough oriented. What's going to disrupt our market places, our customers, in the next positive way we can. That's been a growing process for us, so, it is throughout the organization, I will tell you it's at varying levels of quality and implementation.

Josh: So a couple of, I guess one comment, and then a question for me. So a comment, I guess we've referenced a couple of times that you and Deublin, some other folks from Deublin, will be with us at the Lean Summit in Carlsbad. It so happens that this is not Deublin's first time presenting at a Lean Enterprise Institute Conference. I think it was 2012, 2013-

Ron: Yeah, sounds about right.

Josh: Maybe when you presented before, and primary reason to invite Deublin to come back, is this sort of evolution, this expansion of Lean applied at Deublin. From sort of more of a tools focus, or a shop floor focus, with a lot of the kind of TPS tools, they're on the shop floor, to something that now is really widespread throughout the company, and has helped sort of define the company's management system, and as you've described, even more expansive than that, it's business system. So just to mention that that's really a primary thing that we're excited to hear about at the summit, is that an evolution, I guess.

Ron: Yeah. By no means do we hold Deublin as the perfect example. But we're willing to share our experience, our learning. It's been good for our organization, and if someone can take away some positives for their organization, I think it's a success. So we're looking forward to it.

Josh: Well, and so then, I guess within that, just to return to a point from a minute ago, and the cultural marker, I guess, characteristic at Deublin, which I think you rightly said is a pretty common one, across businesses. The tendency for management often to sweep problems under the rug versus really embrace them versus looking for a bad part, and the question to why that part, as your coach demonstrated. I guess, is there an individual, maybe it's yourself, I don't know, or maybe there's someone else, who really kind of symbolizes the transformation, I guess, from that tendency, to an embracing, I guess, of problems, that we can kind of learn from. What was it that helped them to become comfortable with that? Because that can be an uncomfortable thing, right? I mean, it can be kind of feel threatening, and scary to be so transparent with the fact that in your area, there are problems when historically it's appeared that that's not the case. Of course, we know that there were problems, that maybe were just being hidden, but to get comfortable with that kind of transparency is not an easy thing.

Ron: I'm certain many of the people that will probably listen to this podcast understand the fact that successful Lean implementations really need to be, not only top-down driven, they need to be organizationally embraced. So, certainly I was probably the instigator of this disruption, because I was the one that came back and said we should try it. But it's really lead by example at all levels. So if my response, my first response is who screwed up versus tell me what happened, right? Then my, the people that report to me start off with the word who screwed up. I don't think that's really productive.

Ron: Again, we have very good employees, we're fortunate in a tight labor market to have the employees that we have. I think one of the things that we learned as we made this transition from tools, to a problem solving human development organization was, we're much more powerful if we can unleash their thinking. It's much better than anything management can put down on a PowerPoint.

Ron: Early on, and even today I will drop in on problem presentations, and I want to hear about the problems, and I, that's an example that, one, I want to set for my management group, but at then, I look for my management group to also embrace that, and we have. It's taken a while certainly, those things don't happen overnight. But again, we were fortunate, the high degree of organizational trust, and really the fact that no one was going to lose their jobs in this area. Have we found cases where, through standards and through our training, employees aren't as successful in one position versus another. Yeah, sure. But many times those employees embrace the opportunity to change that. If they understand the situation, they understand the metric that they're being measured against, and they acknowledge that that's something that they're not good at. A lot of our assembly is a very nimble, requiring a great deal of dexterity, in the assembly process, that's not for everybody. I certainly couldn't do our assembly process.

Ron: So, when we make the problem visible, "Ron can't do the assembly and meet our takt time." But I have another opportunity for Ron over here, it's much less threatening. So, do I want to point at one person? I think that'd be an understatement of how well the organization's embraced it to say one person led it. I mean, certainly everyone knows, and I say clearly, I want the replacement of my job to come through our DPS organization. So I want, but that's an expression of our commitment to that thinking.

Josh: Right. Yeah. So I guess what you're making me appreciate is, we talked about the strength in organizational trust that's been a hallmark of Deublin, since long before 2008, an introduction to Lean, and that was something you were appreciating even when you joined the company in 2002. I think I may have described, or maybe you did, that that could be recognized in the trust that exists between management and folks on the front line, the folks that are creating value.

Josh: But I guess you're making me appreciate too, that there must also be trust in place, and I guess being reinforced also between sort of top-level management executives like yourself, and the management tools, sort of more in the quote-unquote "Middle." That trust is, has been really key too, so that those folks, not, I mean that was a, sort of a, I guess a level in the organization that you acknowledged, struggled maybe a bit more at the beginning. So for there to be trust again between those kind of top-upper levels, must have been really important too, as demonstrated and reinforced by your leadership. The fact that you don't show up, and start throwing blame at people, but get focused on the process, and the problems.

Ron: Yeah. Josh, it's one of those things again, because now we've been added since 2008, so it's 12 years, hard to believe. It feels it hasn't been that long, but I'm glad to say it is 12 now, and hopefully it'll be 25 soon. One of the things though, is we migrated from the early days to much more of a problem solving focus that grew into our human development focus. We're better at recruiting people today, the leap to DPS is not as great. So, by the human development aspect, we understand what it takes to work in our environment, and it's not for everyone. But so, while those middle managers of 2008 really had a hard time grasping, because what they really were, were the best operator, or the best salesman, or the best whatever.

Josh: They were the expert, and you talked about.

Ron: Exactly. Today we're looking for much more of a change in the approach, collaborative problem solving, constructive. We're still a very action oriented company, that's in our nature. So we don't want paralysis by analysis, but we want constructive thinking. So the people that we bring in today, their ability to integrate is better because we're better at who we bring in.

Josh: Sure. So, one last thing that I want to ask about, and this was something that you had mentioned to me before we started recording, and you just sort of alluded to it, so as part of your, I guess routine, your top management work, you just mentioned dropping in on problem solving presentations, and celebrating the fact that problem solving's happening. You had mentioned to me before we started recording, that recently you awarded the problem solver of the year, or the problem solve of the year, I can't remember exactly, but-

Ron: Solver.

Josh: So, maybe you could tell us a little bit about that. That seems like an interesting practice there at Deublin.

Ron: Well, is in an effort for us to improve our problem solving abilities. We've broken down by departments, a requirement to have a problem solving report out, every week, and a group of management, and it ... So it feels virtually every day of the week, there's a one hour departmental report out, and so a group of managers will attend say, three different departments on Monday, and then three more departments on Tuesday. Then we kind of grade the score, the problem solving activity, and what we're really looking for is growth and thinking, not necessarily the best, the most economical problem solving that saved X money, or time, or whatever. We're really looking at, growing the thinking in the organization.

Ron: It's funny because the employees built their own trophy, and so we have a problem solver of the month, every month we celebrate and acknowledge, and they get the trophy for the month. Then at the end of the year, we do a little celebration, we just had it yesterday afternoon, where we call all of the employees and for both shifts, and we call the 12 problem solvers of the month up to the front, and we spend a little bit of time talking about the meaning of problem solving to the company, and why it's so important and how it's been the positive for all of the employees. Then we acknowledged the employee that's the problem solver of the year, and he gets a trophy, and we have a plaque with, for every year with a person's name on it. This is, I have to be honest, this is only our second year of the problem solver of the year award, but-

Josh: The 24 problems solvers of the month.

Ron: Yeah. But we're celebrating the idea of it, and of course, it's a nice way that for me to be able to walk past any departments, say, "Jeez! Josh, I was surprised you didn't win the problem solver of the year, you're going to make it next year?" It's just to reinforce the need for that kind of thinking in our working station, it's no money, it's no extravagance. It's just acknowledgement of the people that are really doing great thinking for the company.

Josh: That's really cool. To hear the emphasis on the thinking, and the use of the method itself versus sort of its output. I guess, the solution not being the point in a way, but instead the thinking, and as you've, the word you've used, growth, human growth, human development, that thinking sort of represents, signifies.

Ron: I will tell you is, as the lead of the business, it's extremely rewarding to me to see the people, and the work that the people are generating using these tools. It just, I think it's the right path for Deublin, and so we're very comfortable with it.

Josh: Excellent. Well, hey, thanks for today, for the conversation. Thanks again for the visit a couple of months ago, and thanks in advance for the upcoming participation in the Lean Summit. I'm excited to hear more. You've touched upon a couple of the themes that you'll be kind of focusing in on, and I look forward to not just hearing from you there, but also some other folks from Deublin.

Ron: Well, absolutely. It's my pleasure. We're happy to share this story, and hopefully it's got some benefit to some of your listeners.

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