

If you know a company — customer, supplier, friend, or your own — that could benefit from improved operations, let us know.

Your best interest is our best interest.

The Finish Strong™ monthly e-newsletter is for business leaders who recognize Operations as a strategic function that creates competitive advantage, profitability and brand loyalty to the marketplace.

DECEMBER MANUFACTURING HITS LOWEST LEVEL IN 28 YEARS

Those headlines make one wonder why we even bother to get out of bed....

Could be because we know survival requires an even faster pace of improving productivity, quality, delivery, safety and innovation as this worldwide economic malaise separates the weak and stagnant from the strong and vital. There hasn't been, nor will there be, time for woeful pouting.

Could be because we know that people around the world still need "stuff." Listening carefully to the market about value means quit wasting time and money on what it won't pay for and concentrate on what it will. Keep listening. Operational flexibility lets us stay in synch.

Could be because we're sick of providing inefficient processes that waste the lives of our employees, cost our shareholders needlessly, and kill our businesses. The statement "our employees are our most important asset" only has meaning when leadership backs it with an obsessive commitment to improving processes until they no longer waste the time and brainpower of employees. Luckily, that is also in the best interest of shareholders and the long term survival of the business.

Many manufacturers didn't live to see December's low levels. Many more won't survive 2009. But the best will. Be among them. Let's pick up the pace. Now.

THE DNA OF RABBITS

Steven Spears co-authored an article published in a 1999 issue of Harvard Business Review entitled "Decoding The DNA of the Toyota Production System." Spears research findings summarized there described four "rules in use" at Toyota that were not easily observable but were inherent to the management and operations of the company. Those rules concerned how to design and operate processes, and emphasized that immediate and wide-spread problem solving using the scientific method was crucial.

His 2008 book *Chasing the Rabbit* describes two characteristics and four capabilities that are the causal factors differentiating high-velocity organizations from the rest of the pack. The decade of research between those two treatises verified the 1999 theories. The examples and expansion of those concepts contained in *Chasing the Rabbit* are important reading for any executive who wants to lead a world class organization.

If you're not focused on driving out repeat problems, and then all problems from your organization, you must have a different theory of what drives success.

In case it's not obvious, driving out problems is fundamental to "obsessive commitment to improving processes until they no longer waste the time and brainpower of employees."

FINISH STRONG™

The Starting Pistol

B. R. Ambedkar (chairman of India's 1947 Constitution Drafting Committee):

"History shows that where ethics and economics come in conflict, victory is always with economics. Vested interests have never been known to have willingly divested themselves unless there was sufficient force to compel them."

The Tape

Rebecca Morgan:

"...yet Alan Greenspan is "in a state of shocked disbelief"..."