



News from the front. That always got people's attention when war correspondents started their dispatches that way. In some ways, I feel like we're in a war—but I hate to dishonor or debase the sacrifice of those that actually put their lives on the line for us and our freedoms. But we are fighting an enemy that is insidious and constant. That is waste in our design and construction processes.

Waste shows itself in so many activities that we do in our industry—in big batches of plans, in wasteful cycles of review and approval, in misunderstandings through layers of those that touch our designs and our projects, in the hidden benefits that lurk in contracts for not being transparent or straight-forward about anomalies in plans or projects, in rework and lack of collaboration between trades. There are so many ways that we waste time and effort. You would think we would be eternally frustrated, unable to move through that ennui that affects us like melting asphalt on a roof that would impair our ability to install a swamp cooler in the middle of summer on a factory roof.

Yet, I am continually amazed by the upbeat nature of “our people”—especially superintendents and foremen on big projects, young architects breaking into the business, project engineers exposed to lean processes and others whose enthusiasm for “building stuff” is almost boundless. The further up the food chain, the less enthusiastic people are but there are executives and senior project managers that see that light at the end of the tunnel and realize it's not an oncoming train. But let's get back to the people who do the work. The field level, the design level, the installation level—the folks who consciously and routinely conscientiously change our environment for the better—are excited. I think of it as the mission of LCI to help capture, enhance and encourage that enthusiasm.

I was in Ontario at the end of November giving a Lean Introduction sponsored by the Ontario Association of Architects. He was enthusiastic about lean and wanted to know how to scale it—“you talk about these large projects but how do we bring this kind of collaboration to smaller, local projects?” Russell Construction in Bettendorf, Iowa joined LCI this fall with the goal of bringing lean processes to regional and local projects. A Dallas regional MEP contractor and an Electrical sub have expressed interest in driving lean procedures deep into their organizations. National contractors are trying to develop their own “brands” in lean; production techniques using various software technologies have been investigated and implemented on a variety of projects. Owners now stretch across the spectrum—healthcare, public owners, higher education purveyors, major industrialists and others are embracing lean. We are fortunate that this June we will be co-presenting the Lean Design Forum with the AIA but also immediately following the June CURT meeting in St. Louis. The nexus between the processes we advocate and their implantation on projects is becoming ever clearer across the spectrum.

That momentum is driving the creation of an Atlanta Community of Practice (thanks to Jesse Plata at Beck for driving that train) and interest in an Alabama Community. There is great power here. Our job at LCI is to assist in that transformation. To capture that enthusiasm and make it more than just crowds cheering, we have an obligation to enhance, encourage and enable



transformation. While we think globally, we must act locally. That means an increased emphasis on helping our COPs develop, capture and report on the growing use of lean processes in their areas. The development of lean is almost inevitable, in my estimation. The seed has been sown and crops are growing across the world. Capturing results in happening—we see that in COP presentations, the increased value and complexity of Congressional report (our Congress, not that fen in Washington that is more swamp than breeding ground) and the stories we hear every day. But the hard part is the reporting. People are starved for metrics as if that was the jeopardy answer to “Is Lean Winning” for a \$1,000, Alex.

What do we mean by “metrics?” Do we mean hard, statistical data? Or do we mean apocryphal, folkloric reporting of results? I think we mean both. There has always been an engineering undercurrent to LCI as there is to our industry. I showed up at a Parkland Hospital pull plan effort in a University of Texas t-shirt only to be roundly booed by the A&M fans in the audience. We are tech heavy—people are constantly trying to turn pull planning into a technology that works as well as the political exchange and negotiation that happens at the weekly pull planning board. But the uneasy truth is that our metrics have to be both mathematical and oral. We will shortly begin a process of recording Greg’s observations of lean implementation around the globe through a series of short films shot in the manner of the Congress videos. While Greg could write white papers about what he’s experienced and seen, the power in the delivery would be lost. Greg is a wonderful and powerful speaker and he transfixes people with his wit, wisdom and experience, not the dry statistics that might accompany project improvement.

We know that projects improve in measurable and immeasurable ways. We know that we cut weeks out of schedules but we also know that we enhance the experience of project participants on lean projects through collaboration, problem solving and claims avoidance. What if we had no metric other than that the people on the project were happy to go to work every day, the project finished on time and on budget and there were no claims? Is that a metric? Do we need more?

Owners will tell us, ultimately, their view of our metrics. But everyday contractors, designers, trades and vendors are experiencing the enhanced value of being part of a lean project. And once owners start engaging robustly on projects, I think their experiences will be both folkloric and economic. We’ll see.

Speaking of seeing, one of my challenges as the Interim Executive Director has been to tackle the website. This week, we made incremental improvements. Visit us at leanconstruction.org. You’ll find four tabs (buttons as it were) that give you immediate access to the 13th Annual Congress, the sponsors page, my updates and Greg’s newsletters and the Calendar. It’s not exactly the AGC or AIA website yet but it’s a start. I hope it helps you access the things most important to you.



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13th Annual Congress Videos

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News & Notes

Calendar

I want to have a button that captures the stories of our community. We'll start filming Greg's oral history soon, and then we hope to have a button with Glenn's recollections, stories from the COPs and other oral traditions that represent the richness our community.

In the meantime, plan on attending the Lean Design Forum in Berkeley, February 16 and 17. We'll have the agenda on line shortly and a direct link to the sign in page. But mark it in your calendar. It's the first AIA co-sponsorship and another watershed in moving LCI forward. Before you know it, we'll actually be transforming the industry. J (This could be the first smiley face ever in an LCI Update).