



My friend Will Lichtig (and others in the Lean community) knows me for my “low associative” barriers. That actually turns out to be a good thing (when properly filtered), according to Jonah Lehrer in his book *Imagine*. “Radical concept[s]” are often “merely a new mixture of old ideas.” The ability to make connections between seemingly disparate ideas is a key to creativity.

Such musings are germane on Independence Day when we celebrate the “radical” concept of separating valuable colonies from the most powerful country on earth. The Declaration of Independence is an extraordinary document that I pull out about once a year (around this time, surprisingly) to remind myself that we often try to tie our radical ideas to rational propositions. The introductory paragraph to our national founding “brief” makes it clear that the lawyers were in the room. While many of us remember “[w]hen in the course of human events,” how many of us recall that the sentence ends with a rationale requiring the signers to elucidate the “causes which impel[led] them to the separation”? The signers of the Declaration thought themselves bound to explain the specific reasons which impelled them to treason and revolution. And they had plenty of grievances. While the current Tea Party movement would have us think the “revolution” was all about taxes, taxes aren’t mentioned until the 19th grievance which only argues that taxes are imposed “on us without our Consent.” Most of the “repeated injuries and usurpations” have to do with self-governance and empowerment. Powerful ideas in 1776.

These are powerful ideas in 2012 as well. I had recent occasion to meet with a group of drywallers and electricians in a workshop on lean construction. I asked them what they didn’t like about the current condition of their work for general contractors on projects. While taxes weren’t mentioned, I did get a list of 16 grievances:

- Last minute changes
- All work has to be done ASAP
- Work starts in incomplete areas
- Work starts out of sequence
- The schedule is not updated in real time
- Stacking trades
- Shrinking duration
- Every activity on the schedule is set for five days
- Non-transparency
- Schedules are delivered after the contract is signed
- Outdated way of “off-loading” risk
- Crew size is managed only to “more people”
- Unqualified trades in front or behind
- No Subcontractor input on:



- Schedule
- Plan of work
- The Master CPM schedule never matches reality
- The contracting process is ridiculous
 - No review of the general's contract
 - Take it or leave it provisions
 - Contract never matches reality of job
- Specifications are unintelligible or unbuildable

At LCI, we have taken on the broad mission to act as a catalyst to transform the design and construction industry through the use of lean principles. How far is “transform” from “revolution?” The American Revolution, as it turns out, was much more about transformation than it was about a radical change in the ruling classes (like the French revolution). Our “revolutionary” ideas include the Last Planner® system. At heart, Last Planner is about including the people who do the work in planning and managing the work. It is about addressing the “grievances” of the trades—the people who do the work and whom we “colonize” on projects. There are some deep analogies between the transformation we effected in 1776 and that which we are now attempting in the built environment.

Lest the metaphor get too extended, let's remember that allowing people to be more connected to their work, more engaged with how work is planned and what work is done, has deep historical roots for us in our American traditions. Imposing schedules without representation will probably not tumble off the lips of our sheet metal workers, but it does represent a true disconnection between the brotherhood of trades that do the work and the panoply of managers that direct it. In our lean transformation, we are not “deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity” that binds our project teams. We honor and respect the hundreds of years of experience brought by the team to projects—we engage folks from the shoulders up. And in that way, we transform our work from the mere imposition of the will of sovereign to a fully enabled, empowered project team dedicated to completing a safe, quality project at the least responsible cost, in time with expectations and in conformity with the needs of the stakeholders. Maybe Independence Day is as deeply a part of the new community traditions we're building as Labor Day.