

GA 22 Michael Balle

Announcer: You're listening to Episode 22 with Michael Balle.

[background music]

Announcer: Welcome to the Gemba Academy Podcast. The show that's focused on helping individuals and companies achieve breakthrough results using the same continuous improvement principles leveraged by companies such as Toyota, Del Monte, and the US Department of Defense. Now, here's your host, Ron Pereira.

[background music]

Ron Pereira: Hey there, this is Ron Pereira with Gemba Academy. I'd like to welcome you to another episode of the Gemba Academy Podcast. I'd also like to thank you for taking the time to listen to the show and for watching the Lean and Six Sigma training videos we offer over at gembacademy.com.

Today, I'm really excited to welcome Michael Balle to the show. As many of you likely know, Michael is the co-author of some of the best Lean thinking books available.

Specifically, Michael and his father, Freddy, wrote "The Goldmine," "The Lean Manager," and most recently, "Lead with Respect." During this show, Michael and I have a fun chat about all three of these books, including some interesting information on why they chose the novel formats.

All of the links Michael and I talk about can be found at gembapodcast.com/22. Again, that's gembapodcast.com/22. Enough from me, let's get to the show.

[music]

Ron: All right Michael, thank you so much for coming onto the show. Where are you calling in from today?

Michael Balle: I'm in Paris.

Ron: Paris, all right. What's the weather like these days in Paris? Is it nice?

Michael: Is that gray and raining. When it's nice, it's very nice for the season.

Ron: No, I love Paris.

Michael: When it's spring and lovely and the fall, and pretty grim in the winter.

Ron: [laughs] Yeah, I know. Michael, let's start things off. Why don't you just tell us a little bit about your background and maybe just tell us how you first came to learn about Lean thinking.

Michael: Complete serendipity. It was a complete accident. At the time, I was doing some research for my doctoral work, my PhD. I was working on mental models. I was working for an area where people would see the same things but see it differently. It doesn't happen that much.

Most people, although they think they disagree, they tend to share the same world view and work. One time I mentioned this to my dad who, at the time, was a Lean pioneer. My dad said, "Oh, God, why don't you go in and have a real job?" I said, "Thanks, Dad." He said, "But if you really are interested in stuff like this, there are these two other guys who are doing some incredible things in the shop floor for us."

I said, "In the plant, Dad? Me? Are you kidding?" That was off to a good start, but I wasn't...I did go. I saw what the Toyota guys were doing with the supplier and I completely fell off my chair. It was just amazing. There was nothing in management theory that I had read that could describe or explain it, and that really hooked me on to Lean. I recognized that I was seeing something pretty unique. I studied this for a while, doing my PhD, and then at some point one of the guys from Toyota told me, he said, "Listen. If you really want to understand this stuff, you've got to do it. You can't just study it." I was starting to become a professor of organizational science. I don't know if there's such a word anymore, but it was organization development, I think, at the time, and I started doing workshops with the consultancy.

I would run the workshops, the Kaizen workshops, which were all the rage at the time, and I could see it wasn't working too well.

Don't take me wrong. The workshops were really fun. Do you remember those early days where we used to move two-ton robots in the middle of the night, and see what it would look like in the morning, and nothing ever worked? It was exciting, but I thought, "Is this really the way to do it? I don't think so."

We started doing this with...my dad, the kind of programs...he'd done very large programs for automotive suppliers, first as an industrial VP, and then as a CEO, and then when the company got purchased, he was VP again, so these big systems, so we said, "Why don't we do this for other companies and why don't we try to teach them Lean the way he'd been taught by his sensei at Toyota?"

I started working with him in automotive, and we did these very big programs, and it was very interesting, but automotive, you've got to...it grows on you, but it's not my...it was really tough. I started working progressively with the smaller companies and this is what I do now is that I coach COOs about...I would say from a 10 million company to a 300 million company. It's very different role. I actually do what my father told me to do is how to coach a COO in creating Lean culture.

Ron: You do a lot of work with Lean Enterprise Institute, correct?

Michael: They're my publisher. We're on different continents. The beauty of the Internet [laughs] world...Again, I can write here on my desk in Paris and they post in the States. I think the way to say this, I always thought I would be the first guy of the new generational Lean thinkers but it turns out I'm probably the last guy of the first generation of Lean thinkers. Do you see what I mean?

Ron: Yeah, yeah.

Michael: I wouldn't say I work with them very often.

Ron: Fair enough. Michael, we always like to start our shows with our guest sharing a Lean thinking or leadership-slanted quotation that inspires them. What quotation inspires you, Michael?

Michael: That's interesting. There's so many of them. I love this Ohba quotation that you can build the Buddha image but you have to put the spirit into it. I just learned recently that nobody ever heard him say this.

Ron: Yeah.

Michael: There's another. One of the things that inspire me is a Taiichi Ohno quotation in his first book. He says something about the fact that in Japan they have this proverb that says that "even a thief is right one-third of the time." Ohno's take on it is that if a thief can be right a third of the time, then the average person should be right half the time. It seems to him that you should accept that we're going to be wrong the rest of the time.

It's going to be seen either, it's like the optimist sees the glass half-full, the pessimist sees the glass half-empty, the engineer sees the glass twice too big. To me, this is really inspiring, this hang onto the fact that no matter how certain you sound on it, you're still wrong half the time and fight several half life and everything changes. To me in my research, this has been a driving thinking.

Ron: Most people know, and as I mentioned in the intro, you and your father, you've written three books. You wrote a book on your own, right? I believe in 1996. Is that right? A systems thinking book. Is that accurate?

Michael: Yeah. I wrote several books. My first book was on systems thinking. My second book, I wish we could do a recall on books. We can't, but...it focuses on re-engineering and then I wrote a book which has a lot of albums being called about revitalizing organization. I was already looking for part-Lean that at the time was not very fashionable but is starting round now, which is the whole dynamic, how do you revitalize an organization to Lean.

It's very easy to see it in the startup element, but how does this apply to various established organizations? Then I wrote the "Goldmine" with my dad.

Ron: The first question I have, though, is really related to the three most recent books, the "Goldmine", "Lean Manager," and now "Lead With Respect".

What's interesting about those books is that you chose to write them in a novel format. I have to say that I personally love the novel format. I'm curious on why you guys decided to go that route.

Michael: Accident, we didn't intend to. When my father retired, he had all these experiment. This experience it's like the guys you read about the Lean thinking, you're OK at Lancaster and Berlin.

My father has a parallel experience in Europe with a slightly difference of tradition, because he didn't have the same senses, and I thought we should write it up. I started writing it with him, a manual, like you'd write a business book, and he was so bored with it. He was nice and said, "Yeah, sure, do what you want," but every time I'd send him something he was bored with it.

That was the first problem. The second problem was that it's a system, so when you try to put it linearly, all of this never fit quite well. Do you see what I mean? They're all connected to each other, so because I write novels on the side, I thought, "Why don't we write it up as a novel? It's a lot less boring. Because of the conversation between the characters you can show, you can demonstrate the system element to this.

Ron: Speaking of the characters, are their real life inspirations for these characters? And, if there are real life inspirations, do the people that you're attempting to represent know they're famous in your writing?

Michael: No, they're really ours. They're our characters in their own right, but they popped out, and they're a mix and match of people.

Ron: OK.

[silence]

Michael: Yeah, there was this movie with Paul Newman, an aging Paul Newman, a silly movie, but it was such a strong character, this is Bob Woods, you know?

Ron: Yeah.

Michael: What this movie enabled me to do, which I didn't expect, is to convey how it feels to be on the show forward being named. I'm in plants, or offices, or in companies, about three days out of five. There's one thing about talking about these Lean principles, but it's all about people.

And people are emotional, and people have moments, and it feels very different from what you read in the books. I think that was really good with a novel format, that you try to share how each...You know how the Prius engineers solved this problem, they wanted to silent car?

At some point they realized that the feeling of silence is not the same thing as the absence of noise.

The feeling of luxury in a car is not the same thing as putting stuff in, so I think this is what we did with the novel, is how you capture this feeling of doing Lean.

Ron: I love that. What I want to do now is have you step through “The Gold Mine,” “Lean Manager,” and “Lead with Respect”, and just give us an elevator speech for those folks that haven't read it. We're going to link to all these books in show notes at gembapodcast.com/22. Let's start with “The Gold Mine.” Give us an elevator speech for what “The Gold Mine” is all about.

Michael: Come on, Ron, I wrote an entire book...

Ron: I know, I'm going to force you to an elevator. You're on an elevator. You've got 20 seconds. Go. [laughs]

Michael: “The Gold Mine” is a Lean one-on-one. It's trying to put the tools, and it does talk about the tools, and seed them in the system. That's really what it is. “The Gold Mine” is you get into this company as desperate situations and it says, "This is the way to go at it. There was an ideal way, but right now we can't even go to the ideal way, so we'll do the simplest thing, we'll just look at the flow and see where the gold."

That was the whole idea. I was coming back from India, and this image of gold really stuck them over there. The gold gets stuck and we need to get the flow going and see what comes out of it.

This is a really a hands-on book in terms of the first step into Lean. Just go at it. Just start hitting the bat and see what comes out of it.

Ron: OK, The Lean Manager.

Michael: “The Lean Manager” is a more mature book. It shows Lean as a full measuring system. It's more novelized. There's more story in it, because I wanted to show, "Why Lean?" to an entire plant, and entire companies so now you have consistencies just to show you have an entire content and technology.

“The Lean Manager” is more about showing the full system of Lean and how to show a transformation of a plant as opposed to just doing it. It's a more complete book.

Ron: Last, but certainly not least, what about “Lead with Respect,” this elevator speech, and I'm going to dig in a little bit. I have a few more questions on this book, but...

Michael: “Lead with Respect” is again a more reflective book. We're talking about guys who've done it several times. I've been trying to teach it to somebody else, and we all know how hard it is, and it really is about how Lean changes you as opposed to how you change Lean, but what Lean contributes to you as a person and to your leadership style.

What we're working towards is first, “The Gold Mine” is, "How do I learn Lean? What is Lean?" “The Lean Manager” is, "How do I use Lean to transform my company?" “Lead with Respect” is "What does Lean teaches me about leadership and management.”

It's the all the way around, how we can have a new, completely...the underlying idea Freddy and I had is, "What does management mean in 2014 and beyond?" Everything we've been taught about management is so 20th century, so where are

we going. This is what we wanted to explore. I don't think "Lead with Respect", the Lean tradition is the only answer to that question, but it is a time-tested, validated, proven answer with a lot of documentation. We wanted to put this answer together.

Ron: I have a few questions on "Lead with Respect," a little bit more detail, but one of the seven elements you write about in the book is challenge. My question is how do you balance this concept of challenge and challenging others with people who maybe they just want to do their job, or maybe they don't want to be challenged, or they don't want to grow? Where do you find that balance?

Michael: [laughs] With great difficulty. I'll risk a risqué joke. You can edit it out.

Ron: OK.

Michael: How do porcupines mate?

Ron: Uh-huh?

Michael: Very carefully.

Ron: [laughs]

Michael: It's a strange question, because I've never experienced it in those terms. As it shows in the book, to me the real thing about Lean thinking is that you start with visual control.

The big fight -- and this is indeed a big fight, is to get middle management to realize, to put in visual control, and take care of it. This is a straightforward, "Please do it," "No, I don't want to," "Please do it," "No I don't want to," kind of a fight. OK, fight.

Once you get visual control, which is a visual way to show the difference between what we've planned and what we actually do. I've never found any resistance from the operators and the employees to actually solving problems. I must say it's never happened. The resistance doesn't come from here.

The challenging bit is that the CEO has to put in the energy of asking the question and being interested in the response, and also showing how these very detailed problems relate to the bigger issues that we have in the company.

That part of it, it always works. People want it. It's tough not in terms of a conflict, it's tough because we really have to think about it. It's hard work to get the gray matter going, but there's never a problem there.

While we do have these fights and these struggles that people make so much a case out of it, is not there, is getting management to accept visual control and to accept problems first and not to shoot the messenger. Some people are not guilty. Not to coo-coo difficulties and to actually face obstacles and get it done.

Ron: The next question I have, I found it interesting how CEO of the software company, again, in “Lean With Respect,” she did a lot of her learning by going to the Gemba, and particularly a manufacturing Gemba, where her customer coached her up.

My question is, is it necessary to see Lean in a factory? Even in their case it was a software company. Or could your CEO have gone to Menlo Innovations or someplace like that where it's another software or service company?

I guess my question is, do we need to go to a factory where they're producing widgets to see Lean in action?

Michael: Absolutely not. Poor Jane, she hated it. [laughs] No, it's not about the...It's not about company, it's about people. It's all about the sensor you have. One other thing I have to share about the writing of this book is that Andy Ward is not such a great sensei. Actually he is not a very good sensei at all.

He's been thrown in that situation by his boss and he's barely surviving. This is the story of his life. He's doing OK. He has a great result, but he's not very confident at all as a sensei. I give thanks to Tom Ehrenfeld and the LEI guys because they edited most of Andy out of Andy.

[laughter]

Michael: He sounds a lot more confident than he was at the beginning. The truth of that, it just happened. The normal format is funny because the characters talk to you. What really I wanted to show is how you had a relationship that appears between Jane Delaney software and Andy doing this. But you've got to be doing engineering. You've been doing anything else.

The other reason that it happens this way because most Lean guys that experience in the factory, I wanted to have a common reference point. These days most of my work, when I work with CEOs, is engineering because that's where the money really is. That's where the impact really is.

I thought about going more into engineering. Andy has a lot of engineering problems, but I use the shop floor examples because this would be common ground for a lot of Lean guys. Does that make sense?

Ron: It does, it does. The beauty I think of the novel format and Andy, as you said, is a slightly flawed sensei if you will. But aren't we all? That's the real world.

Michael: It was always a bit of a tussle with the editor because my deal has always been to be as authentic and as honest as I can. The editor would say, yeah, but for our audience we need to have more of an ideal...

Yeah, I think we found a nice balance. You don't have a whole soul searching where Andy has to go through...Yeah, I think we're all flawed. I don't think of it as flawed. I think we're all works in progress to be honest. I also think that this is a good thing.

Here's the thing, Ron. I work with people over five, six, seven, eight years. The five things of Lean that people seem to insist on is really in the beginning, but it really disappears really quickly. What gets exciting is after a while is when I try to show in the second part of the book is people really surprise you with their initiatives and their creativity and their suggestions. Really we want to get their as quickly as possible.

Unfortunately these big Lean programs that the big companies do doesn't take you there. It's all about static efficiency. It's not about the dynamic aids. Unfortunately this is a bad image for Lean because if you do these big road map programs, you just cash out. You never get to the fun part, which is what is my daily life. We have problems. Nobody knows the answer. The guys who do these things get involved and they open doors we never imagined.

This happens to me all the time in engineering. A contractor has a different idea of something, we decide to do open source. This is where you get the real excitement of people joining in where the company is going through their work.

I really would like to emphasize that part of the book, which is towards the end of the book. It starts to happen in the software company. It's so funny because in fact Jane Delaney gets there so much quicker than Andy Ward does with his own plant.

Ron: The last question I have, and this is not even close to a fair question, so I apologize in advance for this. Michael, if you had to choose, which of these last few books is your favorite?

Michael: Wow. I'm a Libra. I can't choose. My wife dresses me because I can't even choose clothing. To put it another way, I would always wear exactly the same thing.

It's very hard to answer this. I think they touch to a very, very different spirit. The goal of mine is I really...It's like your firstborn. It has a rawness and it goes straight to it. I think this is a great book.

If you want to forget all the noise about Lean, just go straight through it. I've read it again recently. It still has its quality of going straight through it.

“Lean Manager” -- there's an element of vanity here, but I really like it as a novel. The characters are developed. What happens to them is the experience that I've found is that you do Lean transformation through time. Through time, things happen to people. They change, they grow. Some do, some don't. This is where you see the Lean managers, that you learn to work with some people and you learn not to work with others.

“Lean With Respect,” that's the last one. I love this book. One thing I love about this book is that it's not at all what I had in mind. I had an even shorter and simpler book in mind. I had long fights and discussion with Tom Ehrenfeld, my editor. To his credit he was absolutely right to make it more grounded to a physical experience.

We really achieved a really good balance in “Lean With Respect” between the novel and the manual. I think we're really there. I really like what came out. Sorry, cop out. I wouldn't know how to.

Ron: That's fair. It's like which is your favorite kid. It's like, ah, you got to be careful.

[laughter]

Michael: Yes.

Ron: You like them all for different reasons, right?

Michael: Yep, exactly.

Ron: Let's go ahead now, Michael, and transition into what we're calling the quick-fire section. This is where you get to share some of your personal thoughts and wisdom, what you've been doing, but now we're really going to focus in on Michael.

Michael: Please no. Please don't. I've got this wall of being 50 staring at me. There are some words I will not go into. Wisdom is definitely not. I want to reclaim my prior name, unwise.

Ron: OK, share your un-wisdom with us. There you go.

Michael: I'm very happy with "un-wisdom," absolutely. I'll share all the un-wisdom you want.

Ron: Got it, got it. We've touched on this a little bit, and obviously your book's touched on it a lot. What does respect for people mean to you? We talk about that a lot in Lean. It's one of the pillars. It's like, ooh, continuous improvement, respect for people. But putting your finger on it can be difficult.

What does it mean to you to respect people?

Michael: To me it's to listen until it hurts. Here's the thing. To me, understanding doesn't mean agreeing. The first step to respect is really I will try very, very hard to understand. I'm not necessarily going to be nicer to you about it, or actually not less dogmatic or not strong in my arguments, but I will commit to understand where you stand.

In very specific ways I will hear the obstacles you face. Even though I believe these obstacles are in your mind, are not real and not that important, I will hear, I'll force myself to hear that you consider this an obstacle. To me, that is the first thing of respect.

The other part of respect I would say I keep people safe from injury and harassment. They don't go to work to be hurt or bullied. Progressively, to respect peoples' autonomy, to engage and involve people in developing their capabilities and to utilize them fully, not to get them to do silly jobs.

There's this big debate with the unions here saying, well, in the factory where somebody can't find something and has to cross the factory, it's a good time to relax, have a coffee and talk to your other people so that they break this informal rhythm of where they have it. I find that very disrespectful. I find that utilizing people's precious time in doing something that is not needed, is disrespectful. Everybody has different ideas about this.

Ron: Yeah. What about the phrase "Kaizen culture"? What comes to mind when you hear the words a "Kaizen culture"?

Michael: Kaizen culture? What about military music? Math and science? I don't know. Happy marriages? Come on! I'm not so sure what it really means. I have a doctorate in sociology. Everybody always talks about culture. It's become like it's a

part of the management tool vocabulary. The professionals of culture cannot really know what culture means.

It's one of these strange words.

Ron: I'm going to push you. What's it mean to you? Not what everybody else thinks. What's it mean to you, Michael?

Michael: To me, I'd say it's habits. Yeah, I could talk about Kaizen habits. I can talk about the fact...Here's the thing. I can talk about the fact...You don't do Lean. You teach people Lean thinking. The habit to look at every process, to look for ways, to ask yourself how this could be improved and then how can this be improved with the people who are not against them would be Kaizen culture.

Don't do this at home! Do not do this at home! Keep playing at work. Do not bring this at home. That's a recipe for disaster. It's the habit of looking at work in terms of seeing the waste and thinking about how we could get these people together to come up with another way of working and to keep this moving. I'm sorry. I'm not making much sense. I'm very uncomfortable with this over notion of culture.

Ron: That's fine. What about this one? What's the best advice that you've ever received, any kind of advice?

Michael: Received or listened to?

Ron: [laughs] I don't know. You tell me.

Michael: I'd say it's go and see things for yourself. I remember learning this stuff from my father. He was a CEO of pretty big companies. Then, on the shelf, was incredible. He was just bored with all discussions. He'd say, "Listen, let's go and see." Every time we did, we realized something else was going on.

This is a thing that Freddy really caught. At first, go and see for yourself and always in greater detail. Then, you discuss the big picture. It's like he goes from incredible detail, and then to the big picture and the strategy of a company and everything.

Still to this day, when we're in a shop floor together, he loses me in the details. He sees things I don't see thinking of processes, and then he loses me in the strategy. To me, there is a magic trick here. When you go back and forth, back and forth from the really detailed gemba, what people tell you and what they do, and the big picture, you start to learn incredible things.

Ron: Do you have a personal productivity habit, Michael, that others might benefit from?

Michael: Productivity? I'm a writer, productivity? I don't think that way. I try to be effective, not efficient. I'm constantly worrying...when my work...again, my work with CEOs, people get it rolling. I'm not teaching them anything. We work together on difficult problems, particularly engineering and product problems.

My obsession is are we doing the right thing? I'm very worried about are we doing it right, the right way. I think people are pretty smart this way. Are we doing the right thing? That's a much larger question.

In terms of quirks that I have, I have some Lean approach, which I'm very fond of. What is good is seven theories about everything, something I learned from some old time sensei. I don't remember when. The thing that when we're going to problem solving or when we have opinions, we go through seven theories.

Once your opinion of is there life after death, well, seven theories. The first three theories are very quick to come because it's just a reaction of memory. Then, usually, four and five, you start cheating. You start renaming something you've already said. By the time you look for the seventh, then you start really being creative.

Ron: We spent a lot of time talking about various books, in particular books that you've had a part in writing. What about if you could recommend another book, in addition to your books, related to continuous improvement or leadership or something like that? What would it be and why?

Michael: Leadership, it would have to be "The Lean Turnaround," Art Byrne's book.

Ron: Why do you say that? You like it?

Michael: It is it. It's not only in thinking. It's not Jeff's book's upgrade. There's something to me that goes with that. This is raw experiences. It's a very great book. In terms of continuous improvement, my favorite book remains Taiichi Ohno's "Workplace Management." I keep going back to this book.

This is a very peculiar way that every sentence is a mix of a technical advice and a kind of naïve psychology. Ohno never distinguishes technique on one side and people on the other. He always puts it altogether. "Workplace Management" is a very surprising book and so relevant even today. This is the book I read and re-read and re-read.

I find incredible things in it. For instance, one thing I found recently and I'm trying to write something about it with Dan Jones and Jacques Chaize is how much Ohno saw Lean system as a teaching system. It's pretty explicit in the writings, except that we're so blinkered that we don't see it. Definitely going back to Ohno's books it's always interesting.

Ron: The last question I have for you, Michael, is let's say that there's someone listening to this right now who is maybe a younger person, starting their career and they're just getting started with Lean in general. What advice do you have for that person? Should they read books? Obviously read your books, but what advice do you have for them to get going?

Michael: That's a tricky one. I don't believe you can succeed in Lean without a sensei. I think that's definitely one of the skeletons in the closet of Lean is that we have a sensei issue. We don't have that many sensei. They're hard to find, pain in the ass, expensive, all those things.

I remember Pat Lancaster of Lantech, many, many years ago, he said, "Hey, find a sensei you can work with, start from the top and go to the gemba." That's the same advice I would have now. Now, the difficulty is how do you find a sensei?

A lot of the books I wrote were about, this is to describe to someone what's the relationship with a sensei. Then, I would say, it's like kung fu or tai chi. You first go into the park with everybody else. You got to the conference. You read the books. Probably first you read the books and you go to the conference.

Then, you go to the private study group. Then, you got to the instructor and say, "Would you instruct me." At some point, the instructor says, "Well, now, you're so good, you have to go up the mountain and find the master." Do you see what I mean? It's a very personal journey.

Every time someone tries work around a sidestep, to find a quicker way, they end up doing something interesting, but they end up disappointed. This is not quite what they thought. I don't think Lean is for everybody. I think Lean is for people who are seriously committed to a competitive edge. Strangely and one of the big surprises in my career is that very few people are really serious about it. The people who are serious about it will read the books, will go to the conferences, will learn who is who, will find a sensei. They will do it just because they're interested. Somebody who says, "I want to do Lean. I'm a young manager. I want to do Lean for my company." The one thing I would say is, "Are you sure? Are you really sure? What do you want to do?"

Pretend Lean, to have an alibi, Lean alibi or do you want to learn Lean thinking?" If you want to learn Lean thinking, that's just like if you wanted to learn tennis. What would you do to give yourself the best odds to learn the best tennis possible? Do you see what I mean?

Ron: Yep.

Michael: The advice is how will you draw your own learning curve, your own learning path to learn Lean thinking?

Ron: Love it. What's next for Michael and Freddy? Are you guys planning some more books or is it secret? What's the...

Michael: Do you mean apart from winning the lottery and retiring on the beach somewhere? There's two books. Somebody asked me recently, "Hey, what

happened to Amy?" I don't know if you remember, Amy is a character in the first two books.

What happened to Amy? Amy, I can tell you, is struggling. Amy, she was this really bright kid, who got at everything in "The Gold Mine" and who left before she got to the interesting things because she was too quick. She got to be a consultant. It turns out Amy has got all the wrong Lean experience. She's got all the easy stuff, but she's never got the Lean with respect stuff. Do you see what I mean?

Ron: Yes.

Michael: Because she knows Bob Woods, she's his daughter-in-law, because she knows Phil so far, at some point, she wants to do it for herself. Amy is currently in the process of buying a company with Phil's money. Phil has retired. He's now running an investment company. She's in the process of buying a technical company, Phil's money.

She is about to fail, as they all do because she's about to fix all the shop floor problems, but discovered that she has an engineering problem that she doesn't know a squat about it. That's what's happening to Amy.

Ron: We're going to hear more about this, I guess, down the road.

Michael: You never know about inspiration. I'm not ready to write it yet, but this is what's been on the background.

Ron: When's the screenplay coming? That's what I want to know. Didn't the guys that wrote the, the TOC guys, Goldratt and them, didn't they try to make some cheesy movie on "The Goal" or something? I think I saw that one time.

Michael: I don't know. People keep telling me about "The Goal." The truth is I read it after "The Gold Mine" because people told me about it. I was not aware of it. I know likely where did things work out.

The other very interesting project I'm working on is with Dan Jones and Jacques Chaize, here in France. We spent 20 years teaching people how to do Lean. We're saying, "Do Lean, do Lean, be Lean pioneer, do Lean." You've been part of that crowd. We tried to think how do we do Lean right.

We've gotten quite a lot of experience of people who have done Lean right. We're asking ourselves the question the other way around, which is "What does Lean teaches us about leadership and management? What is the management model coming out of 20 years of experience with Lean?"

That's a very interesting, intriguing question. That is incredibly intuitive. He's got such insight into it. We're struggling. I have to admit. We're struggling. We're exploring this, but that's another big project is not worry about doing Lean, start asking yourselves the reflection question, the hansei. After 20 years of teaching Lean thinking, what does it tell us about running companies?

Ron: Can't wait to see what you come up with next, Michael. I really enjoy your work.

Michael: Thanks.

Ron: To wrap this thing up, this episode up, I would ask you to share final words of wisdom, but I'm not going to do that. I want you to...

Michael: I've been very good up to now. Can I make a very loud noise or something?

Ron: [laughs] Yeah.

Michael: [shouts]

Ron: Why don't you tell people how they can connect with you on social media or maybe your websites or whatever is the best way to get in touch with you?

Michael: The best way would be Michael@michaelballe.org or LinkedIn. I'm pretty easy to find on LinkedIn. Incredibly, how do you say this, "I'm tweeting or I'm twittering?"

Ron: You're tweeting, I think, yeah. Tweeting.

Michael: It feels more like twittering sometimes.

[laughter]

Ron: Twittering your wings maybe. [laughs]

Michael: Twittering. I'm @Thegembacoach on Twitter.

Ron: I like the feature you're doing over on Lean.org, "Ask Me Anything," that's pretty cool.

Michael: That was a strange experience. That was an interesting experience. Was it? Did you...

Ron: I didn't ask anything, but it's interesting to see. There's quite a dialogue going there. That was...

Michael: I thought it was interesting questions, not at all what I expected.

Ron: You never know with the Internet, right? You just put it out there and see what happens. [laughs]

Michael: Exactly. The great thing about the Internet is nobody knows you're a dog.

Ron: [laughs] We could go off tangent here, but we won't. We'll keep it on the tracks here. [laughs] All right. Michael thanks again for taking the time and thanks for writing the books that you've written. They really move us forward here in a Lean world. I know they've helped me tremendously. Keep up the great work.

Michael: Thank you. It's a lonely work to write and you don't hear that very often. It's lovely to hear that people actually read the books. The one thing I would say is the other very lonely thing I do, and I don't know if you ever read it, is the Gemba Coach Column.

Ron: I do read it.

Michael: Sometimes I feel I'm the last shop floor guy remaining in Lean. It's a very bizarre experience. Everybody's talking about Lean in such strange terms and I say, "Well, we still have to reduce change over time now."

Ron: It's interesting that you say that because so much of the challenge with have with the academy is people are so, "Oh, what tool should I learn first." At one point, we're like, "Well, what problems are you trying to solve?" That's where we want it to start is what problems do you have.

At the end of the day, it's not about the tools, not about the tools, everybody says that, but I think it's a slippery slope. We can go too far and say, "You got to have some tools." We can talk about respecting people and all this kind of stuff left and right, but...

Michael: That's so strange about it. I'm a told to guy. I think it's like the Zen story. There's a Zen story that before you study Zen, you see the mountain as a mountain. You study Zen and the mountain is no longer a mountain. Then, you get Zen and the mountain is a mountain.

I feel the same about tools. Before you study Lean, it's all about the tools. You get to a strange point where it's about problem solving and I don't know what. Then, you get Lean, it's all about the tools. Of course, it's all about the tools.

Ron: I think it's a process. For some people, it just depends on where they're at. Even, to you point of a novel, the character, that person's inside of them. Some people are very analytical. They need to get the facts. Other people, they need to empathize. Matt May, Jacques Chaize, one of his biggest things is to show empathy for people.

I think it's different for each person. But yeah, the tools, obviously, you got to have them. Like you said, if you don't know how to do quick changeover, then it's going to be difficult for you to be an effective...

Michael: Lean your entire company. One thing I would love is people were less hesitant to comment on the Gemba Coach Column and ask questions. This Gemba Coach is great discipline for me because it forces me to go back to the essentials and write. I'd love to hear questions from everybody out there. What are the obstacles they're facing today? Is there anything in the Lean tradition that can help them?

Ron: We'll definitely link to it here in the show notes for this episode. Everybody, go over there and check it out. The last thing is, and I'll go ahead and I'll mention this when we record the intro for this, but we do want to give away some of your books as Gemba Academy's gifts. We're going to work with you somehow to get you to autograph them somehow and, I don't know, mail them over to us or something.

We'll figure that out, but what we're going to do is...

Michael: It might be logistically a bit complicated.

Ron: We can figure it out. We're Lean thinkers.

[crosstalk]

Michael: The French post office at some point.

[laughter]

Ron: It can be the worst of...

Michael: Think about it.

Ron: We want to do that as well, so hopefully we can get that worked out and get some of your books out to folks that haven't been able to read them.

[background music]

Michael: Brilliant, thanks. What you're doing, guys, it's absolutely great. I love it.

Ron: Thank you. All right, Michael, you be well and we'll talk again soon.

Michael: Bye.

[background music]

Announcer: Thanks for listening to the Gemba Academy Podcast. Now it's time to take a free, no strings attached, fully functional test drive of Gemba Academy's School of Lean and Six Sigma over at gembaacademy.com. Gain immediate access to more than 500 Lean and Six Sigma training videos free of charge at gembaacademy.com.

[music]