

Cultivating Champions of CI

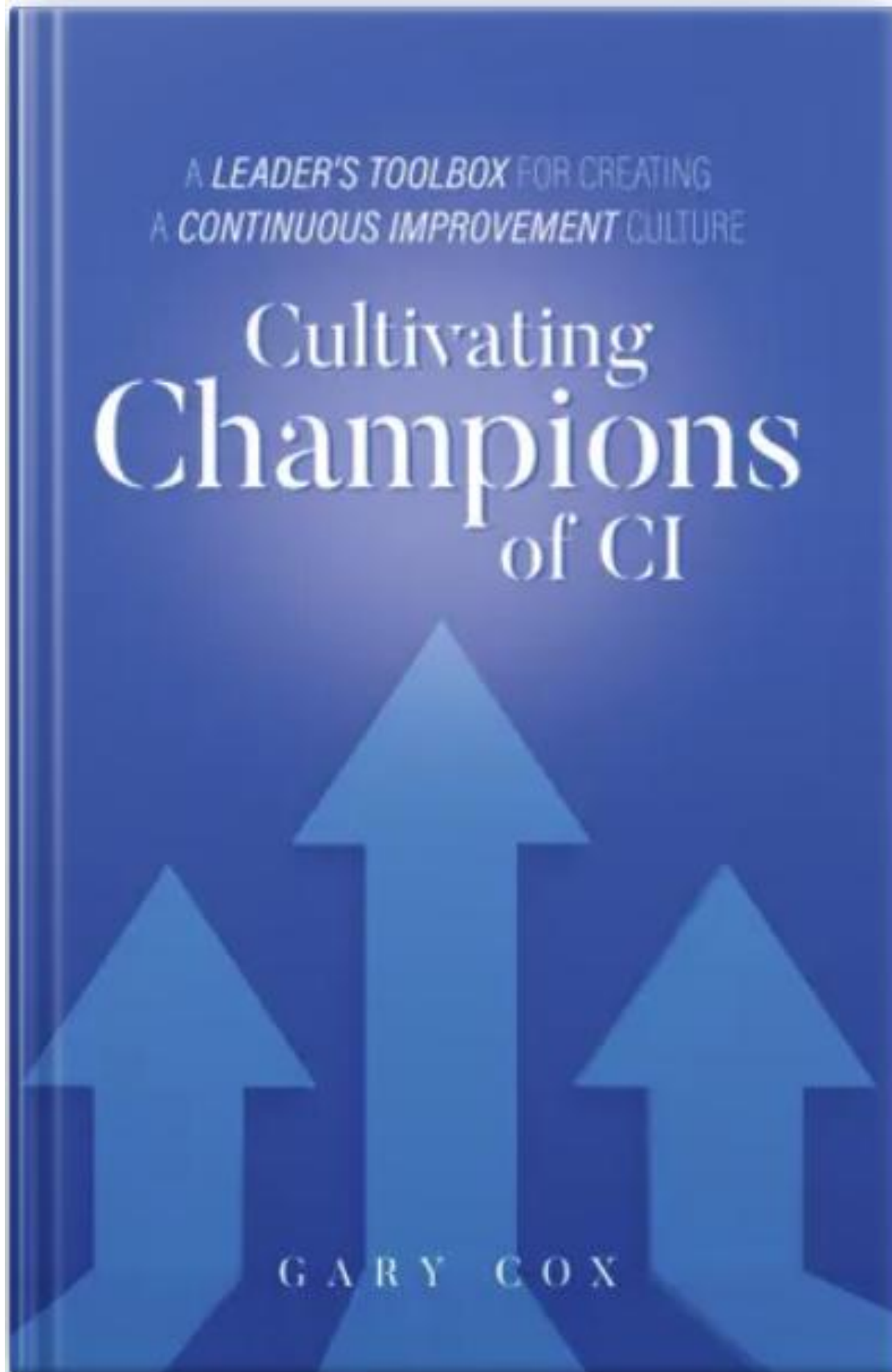
“This book focuses on the human element of CI, which sets Cox’s book apart. The realistic scenarios highlight the importance of mentorship, collaboration, and listening to frontline workers.”

-ReaderViews Magazine

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*"This is an outstanding resource book that introduces new concepts and fundamental leadership traits crucial for success, particularly for those dedicated to fostering their team and organization's growth as they tackle the ever-changing demands of clients/customers. The storytelling approach charts the path of an organization and its varied and relatable leaders. It is essential reading for any large organization, including both current and aspiring leaders. **The book provides stimulating insights to help you assess your capabilities as a leader and your colleagues.**"*

**Larry Coté,
Founder & Managing Director,
Lean Advisors Inc.**

*"This book is a must-have for all levels of professionals interested in exploring CI. Gary is a master storyteller, and the book is an easy read. The action items are practical and can be implemented in any industry. **The book provides a clear roadmap to developing a CI mindset.**"*

**Dana Bhattacharyya, PhD,
Research & Development, 3DBioFibR**

*"Gary has done an impressive job composing a **compelling story that capitalizes on key lessons** he has learned over his career as a CI leader and thinker. The unique format of this book leverages his personal reflections and operational experiences to inspire his audience to reflect on and then action their own personal transformation into a genuine and committed continuous improvement leader. Gary will set you on the right path going forward. **This book will spark the critical importance of CI leadership, at all levels, that takes your business performance and CI culture to the next level.**"*

**Bryan Epp, General Manager (Retired)
Process Engineering & CI, Canada Post Corporation**

"Gary has created an approachable and engaging narrative filled with relatable situations and thought-provoking questions. He encourages you to think first before sharing his own experience to avoid fast-tracking the lessons learned. A great read for new champions, sponsors, and practitioners alike."

**Christopher Anstey,
Operational & Services Manager,
Province of Nova Scotia**

"This book combines years of Continuous Improvement (CI) experience with the art of storytelling to highlight the often hard-to-explain elements of successful or failed culture transformation—the human element. It explores this within both enterprise and behavioural contexts, making it tangible, identifiable, and relatable across various roles. As a result, it is a 'must-have' tool for any transformational leader."

**Isaiah Olateru, Founder &
Lead Transformation Architect, 100Xponential**

Testimonial

I have had the sincere honour of working with some amazing clients with Barrington Consulting, supporting them with their continuous improvement journey. The following is a testimonial from one of those clients, Troy Lenihan, Senior Director, Business Operations, Eden Valley Poultry.

My first encounter with Gary occurred when our team was in search of guidance on our CI culture journey. From our initial meeting, it was clear that he possessed a deep understanding of our needs and challenges. Gary crafted a proposal that was not only top-notch but also intricately connected to our vision, mission, and strategic goals. His passion for collaboration and problem solving was evident and inspiring.

Over the course of eighteen months, Gary worked closely with our teams, successfully leading numerous Green Belt projects that delivered sustained results. He also provided invaluable coaching and training for Green Belts and Black Belts. Gary adeptly combines hard skills, such as Six Sigma tools, with essential soft skills like change management and effective leadership. His fourteen-week leadership program for our frontline leaders was a masterclass in integrating CI tools with culture change strategies, equipping our team to apply these concepts in their daily work.

Through the principles outlined in Cultivating Champions of CI, I have witnessed significant success in both our operations and our leaders. Gary's approach develops culture change agents who prioritize both people and processes.

As I read about Gary's personal journey, I felt a profound connection. Like him, I began on the frontline and advanced to a Senior Director of Operations role. The characters and scenarios he describes resonated with my own experiences, and I attribute much of my success to the principles he advocates listening to frontline insights, inspiring and engaging teams, and serving as an effective leader and coach.

I am pleased to endorse Cultivating Champions of CI, a remarkable resource that offers invaluable insights into the real-life challenges of establishing a sustainable continuous improvement culture. Gary provides a comprehensive framework of tools and skills essential for effective problem-solving, along with a practical playbook for coaching and mentoring leaders and teams. This book is an essential guide for committed senior leaders seeking to foster a mindset of continuous improvement within their organizations.

Whether you are a new supervisor, mid-level manager, or senior leader looking to enhance your leadership skills, Cultivating Champions of CI is a must read. I wholeheartedly recommend this book and can assure you that a copy will always occupy a prominent place on my bookshelf.

Troy Lenihan,
Senior Director, Business Operations,
Eden Valley Poultry Inc.

About the Author



Gary Cox has dedicated over twenty years to deploying continuous improvement (CI) across diverse industries, leading to substantial cost reductions, improved organizational objectives, and enhanced leadership development. As a Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt, he led the CI program at Canada Post, serving as the National Director of Process Engineering, Improvement and Integration. In 2015, Gary joined Barrington Consulting, launching a new line of business in Operational Performance Services (OPS) serving private and public sectors in their development of their CI culture.

Recognized as a CI expert, Gary has delivered impactful presentations at global conferences and developed custom CI courses for international and domestic clients. Gary has a vibrant following on LinkedIn and contributes his expertise through collaborations with other CI practitioners on his YouTube webcast, *Mic Drop: Insights & Lessons from CI Thought Leaders*.

Gary's creative endeavours include his original Cox-Box cartoons, illustrating a comic book on Lean Six Sigma Change Management, and the book *LEAP for Faith*, a book and program on spiritual growth endorsed by the Anglican Church. He also produced and co-hosted the *LEAP for Faith* TV program and has written, produced, and directed multiple dinner theatres. These varied experiences showcase his unique perspective on creativity, storytelling, professional, and personal development.

Dedication

Heather, I can't thank you enough for all you have done for our family. You, Danielle, Chelsea, and their families are a driving force behind all I aspire to accomplish. I love you all.

Thanks to

Sincere thanks to those who mentored me in honing my leadership and continuous improvement skills over my extensive career. To Andrew Creaser, Barrington Consulting Group Managing Partner, a special thanks. Without him, this project would not have come to fruition. To my Barrington OPS team and to those who helped shape this book by reading the draft and providing invaluable feedback: Ian Kerr, Bryan Epp, Robert Newcombe, Trevor Bent, Isaiah Olatreau, Will Easson, Susan Elliott, Gurprit Singh, Ringailė Lydžiūtė, Catherine Filion-Lachance, Jim Trussler, Christopher Anstey, Larry Coté, Troy Lenihan, and Dana Bhattacharyya. Thank you all. A call-out to Linda Bolton, who undertook editing an early version of the manuscript. I also thank the team at Tellwell for their guidance in publishing the book. They have a world-class process and team. And finally, to the clients that I have had the privilege and honour to serve since joining Barrington Consulting, thank you for trusting me.

Foreword

“The only way to do great work is to love what you do.” ~ Steve Jobs

I met the author of this book several years ago and the above quote epitomizes who he is. Gary has a passion for making things better and sharing this passion with others. He is an evangelist for continuous improvement and genuinely enjoys teaching and coaching people to enhance their working environments and improve their organizations. It is part of everything he does, from the most mundane tasks to critical processes that are the lifeblood of organizations.

Close to a decade ago, Gary approached me about joining Barrington and offering continuous improvement (CI) services and Lean Six Sigma (LSS) training. I was initially skeptical, as Barrington was traditionally an IT-focused organization and CI services and training were not something that we intimately understood. After a few discussions with Gary, I developed a very comfortable feeling about this opportunity based on the enthusiasm and excitement emanating from him.

In ***Cultivating Champions of CI***, you will feel that same enthusiasm throughout, as it is the essence of Gary's commitment to developing new leaders in CI. Over the past several years, Gary has painted a vivid picture for me of the impact that LSS and CI can have on organizations. I have witnessed the positive impact in organizations that have adopted CI programs under Gary's leadership and the dramatic improvements that have been achieved in their leadership, their people, and in their financial performance.

I have dedicated my career to providing services to organizations focused on making improvements. As the Managing Partner of Barrington Consulting, I have learned that the best investment in our organization is in improving and enabling our people. This has always been Gary's focus. He has gained significant wisdom over his career, knowing that each organization is different, and that culture and people require different approaches and solutions to be successful. He is patient and kind in his delivery but direct, so that his message is clear and his teachings impactful. Gary is an expert in this field because he genuinely cares about improving an organization and enabling its people and supporting its leadership. He has done this in my organization with a keen eye to improving process and delivery, and training and mentoring the next generation of CI experts.

In this book, Gary combines a unique blend of storytelling and practical advice to inform the reader about using the tools, techniques, and approaches of LSS to solve problems and implement solutions that can be adopted in any organization. Furthermore, the book is

structured to ultimately advise the reader about how they can implement and cultivate a CI culture in their organization using critical elements focused on vision, leadership, and empowerment. It is genuinely fun to read and serves as a playbook for both emerging and experienced CI leaders. You will be drawn in by the challenges experienced by the company and the journey they take to become a successful CI organization. Gary weaves a realistic story about how people behave during these transformative journeys and what a CI leader can expect as an organization change to a CI culture. This book is certainly a welcome and must-have addition to any CI library.

Andrew Creaser, Managing Partner, Barrington Consulting Group

IMPORTANT TO NOTE BEFORE YOU READ THIS BOOK:

I wrote this book for everyone in an organization, “top floor to shop floor,” as they say. Whether you are a senior leader, mid-management, on the frontline, an engineer, project sponsor, project leader, coach, mentor, or continuous improvement (CI) trainer, you can draw value from this book. This book addresses the underlying challenge of creating an organization where everyone feels responsible for driving improvements in their workplace, and the leadership that enables it. The primary focus of this book is to explore the challenges and triumphs of a leader's role in developing a continuous improvement (CI) culture, with Lean Six Sigma (LSS) serving as the primary backdrop for the approach. It's crucial to emphasize that the principles and insights explored in this book extend beyond LSS alone. Whether your organization has yet to implement a formal Operational Excellence or CI program or embraces the standards of Total Quality Management (TQM), American Society of Quality (ASQ), Canada Awards of Excellence, International Organization of Standards (ISO), Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, or other effective CI programs, the fundamental concepts of leadership in cultivating a CI culture remain universally applicable.

How to Get the Most from This Book

The book has two sections:

1. **The Tale:** As you read the story of Sherry, a General Manager committed to mentoring her team toward embracing a continuous improvement (CI) mindset, you'll see her encounter the delicate balance between demanding immediate results and nurturing long-term growth of a team. *Cultivating Champions of CI* tackles the pervasive challenge organizations face in fostering a culture of improvement. This tale is not just a story, but a journey that unlocks the code of effective leadership and cultural transformation, enriched by the twenty years of

proven real-world experience I bring from training and mentoring continuous improvement in the public and private sectors. **Reflection questions** follow each chapter, asking you to draw lessons from the characters in the story. Take advantage of these questions to assess your own leadership style and organizational culture. You have my permission to mark up this book, so write in the spaces provided and the margins. Highlight the things that resonate with you. It's OK to even dog-ear pages if it helps you keep track of what you want to refer to later. Make this book your own CI Leader toolbox.

2. **Beyond the Pages:** This section dives deeper into the questions raised through The Tale. In this section, I share personal stories, lessons learned, and tools, drawing on my extensive background in CI leadership. This section provides specific takeaways and calls to action. To add a little levity, I have included my original Cox-Box cartoons.

8 Elements for Cultivating a Continuous Improvement Culture

Throughout this book, you will read about the eight elements for creating a culture of Continuous Improvement, even though they are not explicitly called out or numbered as such. The narrative tale, the reflective questions, and the personal examples in the Beyond the Pages section will affirm how the eight elements form a proven framework for creating champions of CI, which leads to organizational performance excellence. As you read the story and the Beyond the Pages section, consider the connections of what you are reading to the eight elements below.

1. **Establish a Clear Vision:** Define and communicate a vision aligned with your organization's goals, ensuring everyone understands the purpose behind CI.
2. **Secure Leadership Commitment:** Gain and demonstrate executive endorsement, equipping leaders to model the desired behaviours.
3. **Empower Your Workforce:** Encourage employees to take ownership of CI initiatives and provide the necessary resources, support, and training.
4. **Build a Structured CI Program:** Develop a clear CI governance framework integrated into daily routines, fostering a culture of problem-solving.
5. **Foster a Collaborative Environment:** Promote teamwork and open communication, making collaboration central to CI efforts.
6. **Recognize and Reward Contributions:** Acknowledge and incentivize CI participation, reinforcing its importance.
7. **Measure Progress and Impact:** Continuously track key metrics and establish feedback loops to improve the CI program.
8. **Sustain and Scale CI Efforts:** Provide ongoing training, mentor future leaders, and build a self-sustaining CI culture.

The Tale

1. The Challenge Is Unveiled

“In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity.” ~ Sun Tzu (The Art of War)

The journey begins in the boardroom where, Sherry, the General Manager, leads the routine morning meeting. As she navigates the dynamics of her team with a maestro's touch, ensuring that each member contributes their part to the daily operations, an unexpected interruption arises—a crisis signalled by Karl's vibrating phone. This moment marks the beginning of a challenge that not only tests the team's resilience, but also highlights the importance of transparency, teamwork, and the ability to adapt in the face of unforeseen obstacles.

The day began to unfold in the familiar rhythm of the routine morning meeting. The gathering pulsed with the familiar cadence of a company committed to its daily operations. Sherry, the Regional General Manager, led the five members of the region's leadership team as they gathered around the boardroom table. Faces from across the region, digitally linked to the ongoing conversation, appeared on an oversized monitor mounted on the north wall. The regional office boardroom and training rooms were on the third floor of the three-story complex, with a few administrative offices and the Service Centre occupying the second floor. The processing plant took up the entire main floor.

Peter, the HR Director, greeted Nancy and her team, who were visible on the monitor. Nancy, the director of the smaller of the two processing facilities within the region, was a top performer. Occasionally, other directors across the company felt they were playing catch-up with her. She had gained a reputation as being a keener.

Chris, the IT Director of the two regional facilities, sat in his regular seat opposite Karl. Karl was the director of this site, the region's bigger processing facility. Rounding out the team was Joanne, the Finance Director. These five directors made up Sherry's leadership team. Their region was small in comparison with other regions across the country.

This was not your run-of-the-mill boardroom with an imposing wooden table and plush leather seats. Sherry, with a reputation for being an artist of change, began wielding her transformative brush just over a year ago when she was appointed to the role. She aimed to turn the boardroom into a beacon of vibrancy and innovation. Two large windows, once a wall with mounted photos of past GMs, now filled the room in natural light. The previously pale and uninspiring grey walls danced with life, painted in hues of complementary lime green and purple. The room was lively and fresh, with an air of sophistication and creativity. The traditional wooden table had made way for a smoky, glass counterpart, and the worn leather chairs found their successors in ergonomic, modern models. Taking care of her team was Sherry's Credo, and she lived it well. Sherry's touch had transformed the space into more than just a boardroom—it was a visual anthem, signalling her desire to create a culture of innovation and creative thought to all who entered.

Sherry enjoyed the freedom and innovativeness of jazz, and yet she respected the discipline and timing in a symphony. The morning routine unfolded with the precision of a well-rehearsed orchestra, each team member playing their part in the daily operations as Sherry, the maestro, tapped out the rhythm, calling on each of her team members to contribute their part when the time came. Lasting around thirty minutes, the morning meeting followed an agenda. First was the welcome and introduction of any guests. Next, the spotlight turned to health and safety issues as a way of preserving their culture of safety. The team then reviewed yesterday's performance, dissecting the highs and lows that influenced the service and quality targets. As the meeting reached its finale, there was always a confirmation of this day's expected performance. In closing, everyone understood what they needed to do to execute the day's plan and achieve the region's goals.

Just as the team moved focus from discussing yesterday's results, the spotlight unexpectedly shifted as the entire room's attention turned to Karl. His phone began a rhythmic vibration across the table, demanding acknowledgement. With a sheepish yet swift motion, Karl rescued his phone, offering a silent apology with a smile and a nod to the team.

Sherry kept the team engaged and transitioned to focus on today's priorities, but Karl's eyes were fixed on his phone. The text message read: "ANOTHER CRISIS. SERVER DOWN!"

The weight of the words lingered in Karl's mind. He hesitated, caught in an internal struggle about whether to share this unexpected twist with the team. He felt confident the others on the team would engage if he brought the problem forward, but in his mind, he knew what needed to be done. The conflict was that he also expected they would want to know. The main computer server

was the unsung hero of their entire operation, and without it, the Service Centre couldn't communicate orders to the production floor. Their carefully crafted processes of sales, order fulfilment, and service time commitments teetered on the brink of discord. The threat of a halt loomed over the shop floor, where the order fulfilment would fall out of step if the system's pulse remained silent for too long. When the system was down, the chance of meeting performance targets was low.

Sherry had worked her way up from the frontline as a Customer Service Manager to the General Manager position in short order. Over the past eleven years, she had moved between plants to leverage new learning opportunities. Her previous work experiences and her passion for self-development had paid off. The frontline well respected her for being accessible and understanding to their challenges. She kept middle management and frontline leadership sharp as she routinely uncovered challenges in the operation overlooked by General Managers before her time. She knew what questions to ask and when to ask them, as it often drew out the best thinking in people. This personal philosophy was one thing she tried to instil in those she led: surround yourself with smart people. She did all she could to nurture her team to exceptional performance and self-discovery, while looking at the data and listening to the staff. All of these were critical keys, she knew, discovered through the mentorship she received during her career. As she liked to think of it, her role was cultivating CI excellence regardless of where she worked.

Sherry glanced at Karl when he expelled an unintentional sigh. She continued the morning review, waiting another few minutes before she engaged him.

"Karl, anything we need to know?"

Knowing his sigh had triggered the inquiry, he sheepishly shared, "The server is down again."

"Got it. What are our immediate steps?"

"For now, we'll have to revert to manually processing customer orders coming in by phone and putting them to paper for the shop floor to fill. The e-orders are not coming in. They'll go to our back-up system, and we can pick them up when we get back online."

Karl rolled back his chair, slipped his phone into his back pocket, and rose from the table to head out. "I'll go speak to the team lead and see what other options we might have." Looking at Chris, he added, "They've already reached out to Tech Services and placed a call with an urgent trouble ticket."

"Hold on Karl," came Sherry's quick reply. "Do we know if anyone else is experiencing problems like this in their facilities?"

Nancy appeared on the monitor, opened her mic, and with her confident voice shared, "We are having similar stoppages here, Sherry. The interruptions are affecting our productivity too. It's costing me thousands of dollars each month in extra labour to keep our customer service commitments. Each time, we also have to revert to manual processing. It's driving my team wild. We all know we've been missing our targets because of it."

Karl shuddered hearing Nancy chime in with this news.

With that, Sherry asked Karl to sit down and rejoin the discussion.

"I'm surprised this is the first I'm hearing of this challenge. If we are to foster a culture of improvement, we need to be open to sharing when things aren't going as they should."

A few heads nodded in understanding, and some heads were lowered with eyes cast down, silently acknowledging Sherry's comment. With his head down, Karl peeked again at his phone, re-reading the ominous text message Carlos, his Service Centre supervisor, had sent.

"Specifically, how long has this been a problem, Karl?" Sherry asked.

Hearing his name, Karl abruptly raised his head from his fixation on the text. "I'm not exactly sure. On and off for a month, maybe longer, but it's occurring more often, recently."

"And for you, Nancy?" inquired Sherry.

"About three months."

Disappointed, Sherry kept her composure. "Let's all pause for a moment and reflect on what we can learn from the situation."

Silence fell on the room and online mics remained muted. Sherry let the silence linger until it was to the point of being awkward. Then she spoke up. "There are four cornerstones to how we function as an organization." She paused. "What are the cornerstones of our Operational Management System?"

Everyone remained silent.

She prompted, "Surely someone can tell me *one* of the four cornerstones." Her team wasn't engaging in the conversation, and while it could have disheartened Sherry, she took it as an opportunity to hold everyone accountable for their commitment to their work. "Nancy, can you start off, please?"

Nancy unmuted her mic. "Given what we're talking about, Problem Identification and Solving comes to mind."

"Thank you. As Jeffery Liker, author of *The Toyota Way*, put it, 'If you don't know what the problem is, you can't solve it.' Can anyone name another?"

"Purpose," said Peter, the HR Director.

"Yes, Peter. Perfect. That's where it starts. And what's ours? Karl?"

Karl instantly recited it: "Our mission is to lead the industry through superior commitment to respect, integrity, unwavering quality, and customer experience. We aim to be the foremost choice for customers, providing innovative products while fostering a culture of innovation, responsibility, and growth for our team."

"Well stated, Karl." Sherry said.

"Well, to be honest, Sherry," Karl confessed, "it's not like I memorized it. It's posted on the wall over there."

Everyone gave a light chuckle. Sherry was unimpressed by Karl's nonchalant attitude. Some enjoyed Karl's dry sense of humour, and many days Sherry would have appreciated it too, as his dry humour was endearing. But not today.

Her tone set the seriousness of the situation. "I'm asking everyone on this team, do you believe what it says on that plaque?" Gliding her chair back, she rose from the table and walked over to stand beside the mission statement plaque. "How do you feel our response to the very situation we're talking about this morning aligns with this statement?"

Everyone paused and reflected.

Joanne spoke up. "No, Sherry, it's not aligned, not based on what we're hearing today."

"I agree. We are still acting in the culture that we inherited, but now we are responsible for acting differently. The previous culture is the result of decades of a lack of consideration. And now we are able to reflect on that and shift to a culture that fosters innovation. This belongs to every team member." Sherry then asked a follow-up question. "Do you feel we're on the right track to becoming the leading organization we want to become?"

Chris responded. "Not if we keep burying our problems."

"Exactly, Chris." Sherry made her way back to the table where she remained standing and continued confidently. "That's our mission as a leadership team: to expose and address problems and grow others in the process of solving them. We won't become world leaders by lacking the courage to expose and address problems. We become world leaders by actively and intentionally listening and acting on information. When we do that, we can be confident we are on the right path to becoming the world leaders we aspire to be." She sat down. "So, if it's our purpose to become world leaders, who's going to take us there?"

Nancy's voice announced it from the speaker on the table. "We are."

"And with the staff," added Peter.

Sherry responded. "Frontline engagement is critical to our success and forming the culture we want."

"So, that's three of the cornerstones," she said, raising her hand and counting them off, "Purpose, People, and Problem Identification and Solving, but we're missing one."

"Processes."

Sherry, pleased to see the increased engagement from her team, continued, "Thank you, Karl, yes, processes," then looking about the room. "That's not on the wall, is it?" Everyone chuckled again. "Seriously though," she said, picking up the momentum when the laughter subsided, "those four P's, Purpose, People, Processes, and Problem Solving, are to be integrated into our entire organization. Processes connect people to purpose, and without problem identification and solving, the entire system falls out of balance.

"We've heard that this morning. The system goes down and we revert to an alternate workaround, adding overtime and manual processing, affecting our customer commitments.

These are symptoms of a broken process. And this highlights another key factor in our Operational Management System: Technology. "Four P's plus T", I like to call it. Technology acts as the connector for all four corners.

"For us to be successful as a company and as a leadership team, we just can't go about working in the business without taking time to work on it. That's the reason the Head Office introduced the CI program and the training. Now is the perfect time to use the Lean Six Sigma CI tools." Addressing the two regional directors, Sherry continued. "So, Nancy, Karl, what do you propose we do?"

Nancy piped up. "I saw this as a development opportunity for one of our high-potential supervisors. I'm assigning them to address it, and I've contacted Peter to enrol them in CI training so that we can get to the root cause of the problem."

Karl smiled, and under his breath, let out a faint snicker. Quickly bringing himself under control, he added, "I thought about that too. But most CI projects take too long to get results, and we need to address this now."

Nancy was quick to rebut Karl's comment. "Karl, I've had several continuous improvement projects with real results in two or three months, sometimes less, depending on the problem and the data available to make informed decisions."

Sherry intervened. "We need to move quickly on getting sustainable resolution. Eight to ten weeks is not totally unreasonable if we get that sustainable solution. We need to contain the problem and minimize the impact immediately and quickly move to implementing a permanent resolution that addresses the root cause. Not addressing this will have an ongoing negative impact on achieving our growth target and the morale of employees.

"Let's see where this lands on the improvement project prioritization list. If it lands on top, let's identify the needed resources to get this moving along. If it's not rising to the top of the list, we need to revisit what's driving our priority projects and what the current resources are working on. I don't want us stopping good improvement work in progress. Changing from one problem to address another doesn't send the right message either, but I do want us to give this problem its due diligence and attention. It seems we might have a systemic problem. We need to validate if that's a fact, and if so, we need to address it with a sense of urgency."

Nancy said, "I put this into our regional prioritization, and it ranked in the top three, Sherry. My local team felt strongly we could manage it as a project. Since then, we've scoped out a problem

statement and I am drafting a project charter to review with the lead resource I have in mind. I can share the problem statement and charter with you, Karl. If you want it, maybe we can align our resources?"

He knew where this was going. Shifting in his chair, and looking back down at his phone, he coughed up the response he knew Sherry would want to hear. "Sure, Nancy, that would be great."

Even in their short time working together, Sherry knew Karl well and could accurately read his body language and tone. "Karl, give some thought to who you would identify as the best person to work on solving the problem. Work with Peter and the HR team to get them CI training if needed. This has to be a priority for both of you. I like the idea of pooling resources. As this is an IT-related problem, Chris, I'd like someone on your team to join the project team as a key resource."

Chris nodded his approval. "I know just the person. I will have her connect with Karl and Nancy."

Karl responded affirmatively. As he rose from his seat and turned to the door, he rolled his eyes at the thought of having to team up resources from both locations to solve the problem. He thought to himself, *This will take forever!*

As Karl approached the door, he heard Sherry state, "Karl, it sounds like Nancy's having success with her projects and the duration of them. We can all learn from this."

Even though Karl's back was facing them, he could feel everyone's eyes looking at him. He said with a hint of sarcasm, "I'm looking forward to it."

Sherry, wanting transparency, asked, "How is everyone feeling about this? I'm very open to hearing from you. If any of you feel we need to consider a different approach, please speak up."

She made eye contact with those sitting around the table. Heads nodded in approval of the approach. She looked into the camera so those online could see her sincerity. All was quiet.

"Karl, I'd like to squeeze in a follow-up discussion with you before the end of the day on the status of today's problem, and I'd like to hear your thoughts on who you want to assign to lead to solve it."

Karl looked back over his shoulder, making eye contact with Sherry as he opened the boardroom door. "Okay, Sherry, sure thing," he replied, then headed out.

He heard the door click shut.

Reflection on Chapter 1

As you read the story, consider your connection with the characters and whether you've encountered similar behaviours in your professional career. Assess the culture of the organization and compare it to yours. The activities and questions at the end of each chapter serve as tools for self-discovery, encouraging you to recognize and affirm the attributes of effective transformational leadership committed to continuous improvement, or as the title states, cultivating champions of CI. Use the space after each question or activity to record your own thoughts and insights. Alternatively, you might consider starting a learning journal, something I did for much of my career.

- 1. Fostering a Culture of Innovation:** *Assess how Sherry's leadership style contributes to fostering a culture of innovation and creative thinking in their organization. Reflect on specific actions or behaviours that align with or hinder the development of an innovative culture. How do they compare with your own?*
- 2. Effective Questioning Techniques:** *Evaluate Sherry's use of questioning techniques during the leadership meeting. Consider how her questions contribute to uncovering challenges and encouraging open dialogue among the team members. Reflect on the effectiveness of these techniques in fostering a culture of continuous improvement. How do you use questions when communicating with your team?*
- 3. Alignment with Mission Statement:** *Examine the connection Sherry makes between the issue and the company's mission statement. Reflect on how well the actions and decisions of the leadership team align with the stated mission and values of the organization during the meeting. How do you lead your team to ensure their behaviours align with the values of the organization?*

For deeper insights on this chapter, as well as the author's perspective and experience, look ahead to Beyond the Pages.

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Beyond the Pages

Deeper Insights and Reflections from the Author

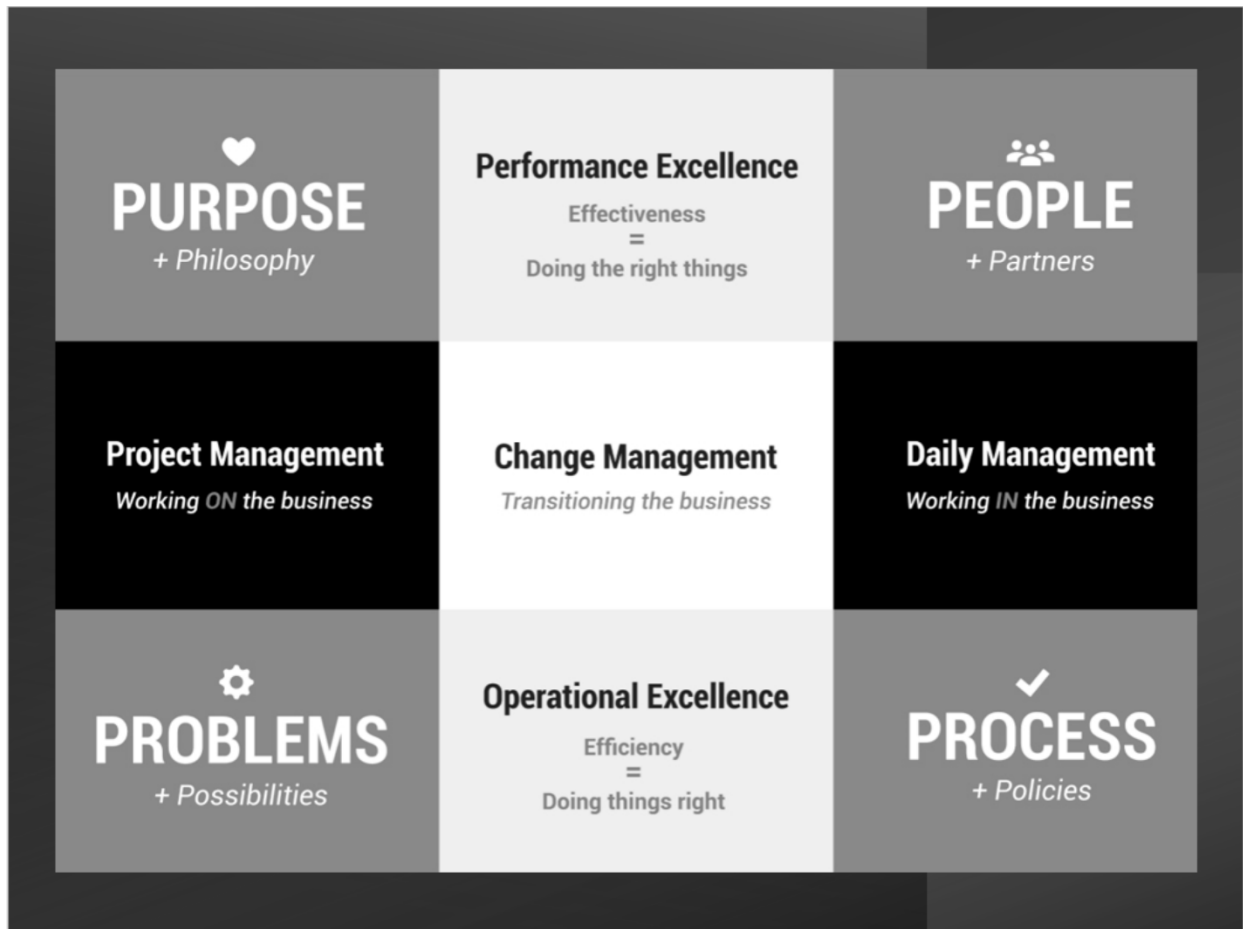
In this section, you'll find my own reflections and deeper insights into the questions and activities found at the end of each chapter. My aim is to give you self-discovery tools to strengthen your own leadership abilities and your role in transforming your organization to a CI culture. Compare your experiences and insights to the personal examples I share.

At the end of each chapter in this part of the book, you will also find takeaways and calls to action. Reflect on the takeaways to challenge or confirm your understanding of CI leadership and how you influence those on your team. I also urge you to follow through on the actions I suggest. They are proven to support new leadership behaviours, and your intentional commitment to action will strengthen the CI culture you want to create in your organization.

As a little bonus, in this section I also included original Cox-Box cartoons. I have been cartooning as a hobby most of my life, and when I became passionate about continuous improvement, I combined my CI passion and my cartooning. The Cox-Box was a regular addition to *iSixSigma Magazine* for a decade. The cartoon's title not only came from my last name, but is also a play on words for a LSS tool. The Box-Cox, which is a tool used in data analysis. Today, you'll occasionally find The Cox-Box cartoons in my LinkedIn posts. If we're not connected on LinkedIn, I'd welcome the connection.

Note: Unless the author was given permission to use them, the names have been changed in the examples of personal experiences to respect the privacy of those individuals.

Before we move further, I want to reintroduce the concept of the Operational Management System (OMS), which Sherry alludes to early in the story.



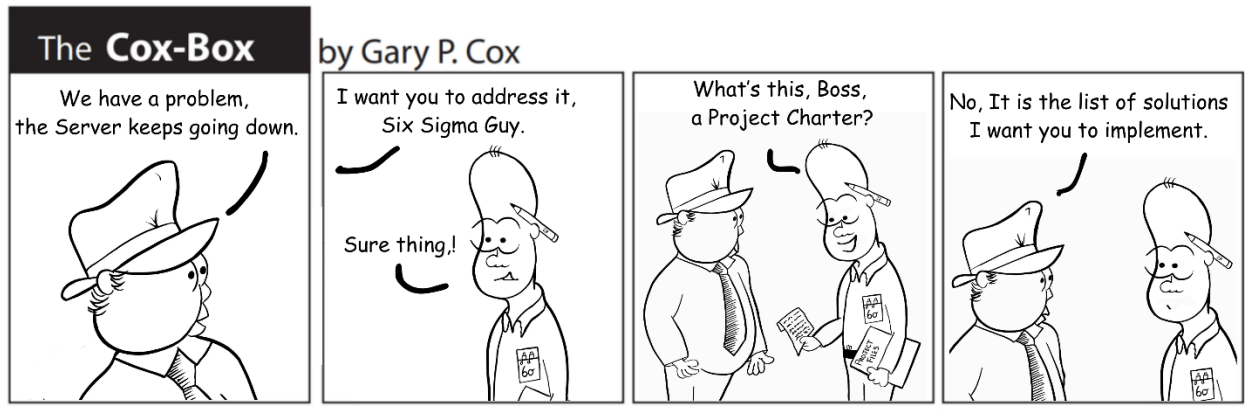
The Four P's are associated with a strong OMS. I adapted this model from the Toyota Production System's Four P's, which Jeffery Liker shared in his book *The Toyota Way*. Their P's have an overarching "Philosophy" as its major "P."

My version includes *Change Management* at the centre, as it is at the heart of any business transformation. You'll also note that between *People* and *Processes* is *Daily Management*, which is day-to-day operations, or "Working IN the business." Between *Problems* and *Purpose* I've added *Project Management*. This is where CI projects specifically come into the OMS. Here is where you are "Working ON the business."

As noted in the story, there is an additional component that plays a key factor in every business today, and that factor is *Technology*, the "T" in what I call the "Four P's plus T." Technology

connects everything. Without capable and stable technology, a company will suffer severely. This OMS model has served me well in aligning all things CI-related within an organization.

1. The Challenge Is Unveiled



1. Fostering a Culture of Innovation: *Assess how Sherry's leadership style contributes to fostering a culture of innovation and creative thinking in their organization. Reflect on specific actions or behaviours that align with or hinder the development of an innovative culture. How do they compare with your own?*

Reflection: One of the most powerful things a leader can do is to be self-aware of their own behaviours, and body language, and what they relay to others as well as the work setting. Our work environment and interactions with those around us emanate the genuine messages we want to convey. Steve Jobs said during an interview, "Your time is limited, don't waste it living someone else's life." You can't fake authentic leadership. At least, not for long. Self-awareness is key to great leadership.

Taking a moment to pause and consider the consequences of your next actions is powerful in transforming the moment. Our actions expose our deepest values, motives, and desires. Our surroundings can lead to responses that help us in homing in on what's important to us.

Personal experience: Two decades into my Canada Post career, I took on the role of Process Excellence Advisor for Atlantic Canada, leading a team responsible for mail sorting process design and improvement. I wanted to set an early tone at the start of my tenure in the role as an advocate of continuous improvement. People could see coming into my office I was setting a CI

tone by its organization, the certificates, posters on my walls, and the well-read CI and leadership books in my bookcase. I am mindful that establishing a tone early sets ongoing expectations—my expectations of others, others' expectations of me, and my own expectations of me.

In Chapter 1, you read about the recent changes in the boardroom. The changes Sherry initiated in this important setting were deliberate. I wanted to show how she is developing a culture that differs from traditional norms and relay she is an agent of change. The boardroom is a visual representation of the innovation she is looking for from her team. In my role, I did the same. Visible on the wall as you entered my office was a photograph taken during a father-daughter camping trip, taken as we portaged our canoe. The photo depicts a path winding through the woods, curving into the unknown. It's more than just a memory. It reminds me we never know what's around the bend in life. Influential leaders walk their path with integrity, trusting in their ability to navigate whatever is around the bend. Beneath the photo, I placed a quote from an unknown author that resonates with me: "Travel the path of integrity without looking back, for there is never a wrong time to do the right thing." This picture and its accompanying message serve as a constant beacon of my most cherished value: integrity. The photo carried profound personal significance driving my leadership behaviours.

2. Effective Questioning Techniques: *Evaluate Sherry's use of questioning techniques during the leadership meeting. Consider how her questions contribute to uncovering challenges and encouraging open dialogue among the team members. Reflect on the effectiveness of these techniques in fostering a culture of continuous improvement. How do you use questions when communicating with your team?*

Reflection: Sherry encourages open dialogue during the meeting, demonstrating her commitment to creating an environment where team members feel empowered to share challenges and ideas, something critical in a leader who wants to create a CI culture and foster innovation. Her use of questioning effectively brings attention to the longstanding issue that exists in many organizations, encouraging transparency and accountability among the team members. Leaders should ask more questions than give answers or tell their teams what should be done.

Personal experience: Canada Post provided me with a coach to support me during my CI training. One assigned coach taught me a lesson about effective questioning. Many questions they asked were closed, requiring a "yes/no" or "either/or" response. I found their questions manipulative. This approach to questioning seemed devious and was a diminishing behaviour, not promoting

self-discovery in me at all. The one takeaway I received from this coach is to avoid this style of questioning.

One of the powerful roles of a leader is to support others in developing their self-discovery of their own actions and behaviours. The art of asking the right questions at the right time is another hallmark of great leadership and instrumental in self-discovery. Tomas Berger said, "The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge." We want to rely on open-ended questions until everyone reaches clarity.

- 3. Alignment with Mission Statement:** *Examine the connection Sherry makes between the issue and the company's mission statement. Reflect on how well the actions and decisions of the leadership team align with the stated mission and values of the organization during the meeting. How do you lead your team to ensure their behaviours align with the values of the organization?*

Reflection: We each have principles and values we live by. Some people take time to understand their core values and try to live them out daily. Some go about their day without reflection or thought on how their behaviours align to their values. Having thought-out principles and values to anchor yourself to is important for consistency and integrity. Using a corporate mission statement or value statement can put employees in the organization on the same playing field when it comes to accountability for behaviours. Even if people do not live those values and principles outside of the workplace, an expectation-and-accountability framework ensures that they are upholding the organizational values and principles in the workplace.

In linking the crisis to the company's mission statement, Sherry shows a purposeful effort to anchor decision-making as one of the organization's core values. By scrutinizing the alignment of actions with the mission, Sherry highlights the vital importance of upholding accountability, integrity, and respect, even in the face of challenging situations. This example of bringing accountability to the surface is the mark of a good leader.

Personal experience: This challenge extends beyond the organizational environment—it beckons leaders to reflect on their personal mission. Crafting a personal mission statement has become a compass for me, ensuring my behaviours resonate with what I hold as crucial to my legacy. When our professional actions align with both organizational expectations and personal convictions, we operate in the highest value-creating zone—a space where everyone stands to gain.

Why do I recommend creating a personal mission statement? Because you are less likely to motivate those you want to cultivate into CI leaders if you do not value your own continuous

improvement journey as a person and leader. Our values and principles drive our behaviours. We need to be clear on what we stand for. Below, you can read mine.

MY BUSINESS MISSION STATEMENT

To be recognized as a leader with integrity in operational efficiency by utilizing proven methods and practices. My mission is to coach and mentor others in their self-development, helping them increase their knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward achieving both personal and business goals.

It took me about six months to mould my business mission statement to the point where I was happy with it and felt it could serve me the rest of my career. I created it in the early 1990s after reading *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, written by Stephen R. Covey, and this business mission statement remains on the desktop of my laptop along with my personal mission statement. The document also includes three strength statements. Those I developed after reading Marcus Buckingham's book, *Go Put Your Strengths to Work*. I share those with you later on. I hope you see the connection between my business mission statement and the drive behind authoring this book.

Chapter 1 Takeaways and Calls to Action

Takeaways

- Your surroundings set a tone and a message. They express your leadership style and relay your expectations to those you lead and can promote accountability.
- Exposing problems and seeing the opportunity to grow the people you lead in the problem-solving process is the hallmark of creating CI champions.
- Effective questioning can prompt self-discovery.

Calls to Action

- **Evaluate your current surroundings.** What messages are they sending? Replace any mixed message or neutral posters with those that support the principles and values you want in your team or organization.
- **Commit to questioning and introspection.** Begin asking positive, thought-provoking questions of your team, fostering a culture of continuous improvement, setting the stage for self-discovery.

- **Create organizational mission, vision, and values statements**, if you don't have them.
- **Create a personal business mission statement**, one you can use as your leadership compass.

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