

Learning to lead at Toyota

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Many companies have tried to copy the Toyota Production System (TPS) – but without success. Part of the reason is that imitators fail to recognize the underlying principles of TPS. This article explains how Toyota makes new managers familiar with TPS principles. Spear describes the training of a talented young American selected for a high-level position at one of Toyota's US plants. There are four basic lessons for any company wishing to train its managers to apply Toyota's system.

- There's no substitute for direct observation.
- Proposed changes should always be structured as experiments.
- Workers and managers should experiment as frequently as possible.
- Managers should coach, not fix the problem.

Instead of going through cursory walk-throughs, orientations, and introductions as incoming fast-track executives at most companies might, the executive in this story learned TPS the long, hard way--by practicing it. This is how Toyota trains any new employee, regardless of rank or function. This article is a sequel to the author's 1999 article on the Toyota Production System.