

New to You

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By BRUCE HAMILTON, OldLeanDude.org [1]



There is a sign along a roadway I travel that puts a wonderfully positive spin on the purchase of a used car. A 2006 RAV4 with 59,000 miles may have been around the block a few times, but at Boch Superstore, it's "NEW TO YOU."

I often recall that headline in a similar context when I'm visiting a new customer for the first time. Toyota Production System (TPS) concepts that have been around the block a few times may still be very new to the person I'm about to meet. I feel like a used car salesman sometimes when the customer rolls his eyes as I list the many reasons he/she should buy TPS. "Take it for a test drive," I say, "you really have to try it out to understand the benefits." And the answers?

"We're not ready to buy."

"We've already taken the test drive."

"We're too busy right now."

There are many creative refusals. It's not easy selling a 40-year-old "new" concept. Shigeo Shingo commented, "[95 percent of objection is cautionary](#) [2]" — or as we say in sales, "[The sale begins when the customer says 'no'](#) [3]." It's just not normal for persons to buy a product without careful consideration; it's normal to raise objections. So, understanding the customer's concerns is the key to the sale.

The range of TPS understanding today is considerable. We learn at different rates and at different times. This gradient complicates communication. Ideas and skills that some folks find confusing are already second nature to others.

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If only TPS learning could be absorbed like this scene from [The Matrix](#) [3]. Alas, off of the silver screen we still need to learn by doing. Change leaders just need to be patient as employees test-drive TPS. A relevant quote from my mom: "Fools are people who don't yet understand what you learned 10 minutes ago."

It was easier when we all knew nothing — and knew we knew nothing. But 40 years after TPS hit the U.S. shores, there are many of us who think we know something, albeit with gaps, and still many more who have not yet heard of TPS. The well-used concepts are indeed new to them. For example, the May 10, 2010 *Louisville Courier-Journal* ran a story about a GE Appliance plant that was reshoring 400 jobs through use of a "new concept referred to as Kaizen." New to them. On a local scale, I have the feeling every time I leave an industrial park that most of the small businesses in the park are still unaware of the opportunity.

In fact, for all of us, old dudes and youngsters alike, there will always be something new to learn about TPS if we keep an open mind and are willing to feel foolish once in a while. Continuous improvement implies continuous learning and sharing with others.

In that regard, a huge TPS learning and sharing opportunity is coming up this month. The [Shingo Prize for Operational Excellence](#) [4] holds its annual conference, March 28 through 31, in Cincinnati, OH. Check it out. I'll be there and hope to see you all then.

[OldLeanDude.org](#) [1] is written by Bruce Hamilton (aka The Toast Guy from the best-selling *Toast Kaizen lean training DVD* and president of GBMP Inc.). [Oldleandude.org](#) is an ongoing reflection on Lean philosophy and practices, with an emphasis on keeping good jobs close to home. Read more at www.oldleandude.org [5] and subscribe to receive new posts automatically to your inbox. We sincerely hope you'll join in on the discussion.

GBMP helps develop a strong and vibrant regional economy through training in continuous improvement principles and is the administrator of The Shingo Prize for Operational Excellence in the Northeast. GBMP's annual conference is the lean event of the year. Contact anna.wells@advantagemedia.com [6] for syndication.

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