

Lean Aikido

By

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This is about my life and the combination of two different arts – Aikido and the art of harmony plus Lean and the art of business. Lean is a business process which is based on the Toyota Production System. The focus of Lean is on the elimination of waste while simultaneously adding value for the customer. “How does this apply to Aikido?” you ask. First of all, they are both never ending journeys in the pursuit of perfection – Lean is about continuously improving the processes to create the simplest, fastest means of converting raw material into a finished product. Aikido is about continuously practicing body movement, control and harmony with the least amount of effort.

There are eight different types of waste to eliminate in the journey to a Lean process: overproduction; waiting; transportation; inventory; motion; unnecessary processing; defects and not using people’s creativity. Not all of these wastes apply to Aikido principles, but I’ll try to explain a couple and how I have been striving to blend the Lean art into the Aikido art.

Let’s start with the waste of motion... any motion that is not adding value to the product or process is waste (ex: walking, bending, looking for tools, etc.). In Aikido, too much motion obviously creates a slower and more inefficient technique. Some examples of that would be: too many steps – two or three when only one is needed; unnecessarily large steps; raising your arms too high when just in front of your center is correct; etc.

The waste of unnecessary processing would be another good topic to relate to the pursuit of perfection in Aikido. In Lean, the waste of unnecessary processing is using the wrong set of tools; doing things that don’t need to be done; or using an incorrect process. Therefore, in Aikido, the waste of unnecessary processing could be things like: using muscle instead of relaxing and extending your energy; having an incorrect stance when you should be in hanmi; twisting or turning your body in a way that causes you to be unbalanced.

You’re probably saying that this sounds simplistic, but how do you know if there are any wastes in your technique? Before answering that, let me talk about the customer in this journey. The Lean process is also about adding value for the customer and not just about eliminating waste. So, who is the customer in Aikido? You are, of course! Adding value for you is done best by no one other than yourself. To add value for you is first and foremost done by paying attention to the sensei during demonstrations and the constant corrections that

we all get and by keeping a journal for reference. Also, you add value by paying attention to yourself as you are both nage and uke, with how you move, blend and feel.

I've very briefly described how I look for two of the eight wastes and leave the other six for you to ponder and work on. Don't get frustrated as you strive to continuously grow in the art of Aikido, think about systematically analyzing your wastes – we all have them – just work on one at a time. After all, it is the pursuit of perfection and there is no rush.