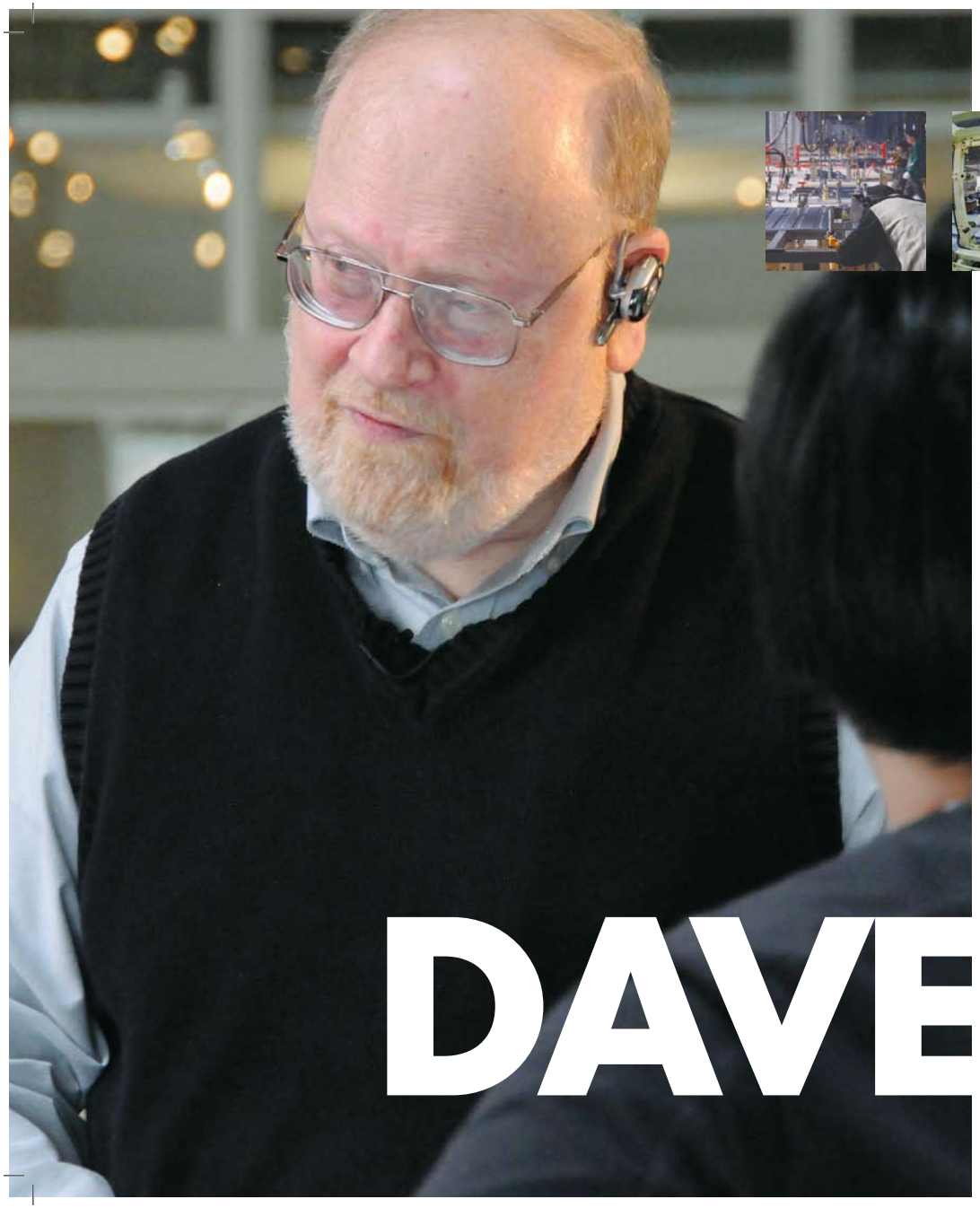










DAVE HOGG

With only several weeks to go to the conference, we thought we'd give our Chairperson a break from writing, reviewing and planning and interviewed Dave about how organizations learn, change and excel.

INTERVIEW WITH DAVE HOGG CHAIR OF AME'S 2008 ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Dave Hogg is Chair of the 2008 Association for Manufacturing Excellence International Lean Conference, co-founder of HPS Solutions, a builder of coalitions and consortia, and a coach and advisor to organizations and companies across Canada and the United States. He is also a certified addict to the rush that comes from helping people achieve new levels of excellence.

If you want to pursue excellence, if you want to really think and talk and learn about quality and continuous improvement, introduce yourself to Dave Hogg. Stroll up to him in Toronto at this year's AME conference and offer up an observation, a story or a question about how people can work together better. Or phone him, his bluetooth is probably on his ear, because this engineer/ coach/ advisor/ listener is plugged in 24/7.

He is always gathering new insight, listening, looking and thinking deeply about how the three essential elements in any organization - "people, process and technology" – can work together in new and better ways. He calls himself a coach, not a consultant, because he is firmly wedded to the concept that if you put the right people with the right perspective in a room, the collective power of those people's experience will discover a better way.

A BETTER WAY TO DO WHAT, YOU ASK?

Dave's answer is:

ANYTHING.

"Silicon chip design, nursing, mail delivery, boot manufacturing, high-tech, low-tech, you name it, all of these organizations and companies are coming to the AME conference," he says, running through a list of attendees, "because they see value in the insight others have gained implementing Lean practices." To reinforce this point, he describes a trip to the poultry processor Maple Lodge Farms with a group from RIM, the makers of the Blackberry, where the high-tech manufacturer found lessons they could apply in the repair, maintenance and overhaul of returned units. "What does RIM do?" asks Dave, with the mischief of the Socratic questioner in his voice, "They take small parts, assemble them and sell them. What does Maple Lodge do? They raise and then disassemble chickens and sell the parts."

CHALLENGING THE NAYSAYERS

With lunchrooms, boardrooms and news headlines abuzz with talk of plant closures, job layoffs, and intense global competition, everyone – from the shop floor to the executive suite – is feeling the pinch. As in all times of transformation, some – the leaders – are motivated to find better ways to do business. Yet daily competitive pressures can make the most entrepreneurial executive wary of change. Dave's response is that "now is a time of peril and also one of opportunity," a theme that he says keeps coming up in discussions with many of the nine keynote speakers at the conference. "For example, John Dineen, President and CEO of GE's Transportation Division (and keynote speaker in Toronto) is fond of saying "'If you don't get globalization, it will get you'."

The discussion could be confused for a conversation with a political revolutionary. He is passionate, seeking radical transformation and long-term change, and in a discussion about how the skeptics can embrace change while they feel at siege his voice starts to rise in excitement: "The first question to be asked is 'Why does this company need to change? The clearer the answer, the greater the opportunity to focus people's energy and attention and really succeed on a new vision."

THE VISION THING

This question leads him to one of the great corporate challenges, tackled by many a management consultant, but in conversation with Dave, it starts to mean something again. Like any good student of science and Lean manufacturing, he tackles the familiar question. "What do you want to achieve?" Or, he likes to explain vision: "What is the future-state you want to inherit?" He continues, keen to explain the opportunity before us: "It's not just that we need to be upbeat, it's that now really is when companies need to fundamentally rethink where they want to be." As the discussion turns towards the economic challenges companies face, he suddenly interjects, "Do you know what the purpose of a company is?" It's not to make money. It's to make money now and in the future". Those who leave out the future won't be in it."

LEAN IS THE ELIMINATION OF WASTE EVERYWHERE WHILE ADDING VALUE FOR YOUR CUSTOMER…



UNDERSTANDING LEAN

This type of forward-thinking runs through his articulation of Lean. "Whenever I am at a company, I like to ask, "What is the definition of Lean? Invariably, most say "the elimination of waste'. Wrong. Lean is the elimination of waste everywhere while adding value for your customer. Only then do you start to realize 'no customer, no job'. Asked about what is distinct about the Lean approach to quality, his answer is that other earlier quality management systems tended to be prescriptive. "They dictated someone else's work instead of probing further into the heart and soul of the people, the organization and the culture." Lean thinking for Dave includes the practical steps such as a visual management system and more straightforward changes to plant floor organization, but he is clear that companies must tackle the more abstract issues of cultural change and defining a sustainable long-term vision for a company, one based on respect, and on shared language.



WHAT IS THE FUTURE-STATE YOU WANT TO INHERIT?…

REAL CHANGE FOR REAL RESULTS

Respect. Vision. Cultural change. These are abstract terms, often labeled 'soft issues' not always tackled in reality. "We have to take creating a no-blame environment seriously", he says, adamant that these issues are central to success. "The command and control approach won't get us there, but asking three little questions can. Did we make a mistake? What did we learn? What countermeasures can we put in place to make sure it doesn't happen again? Only then will you have people bringing forward solutions. Up to that point you'll only get the politically correct stuff, or nothing whatsoever from some employees." His conclusion sounds again with the ring of the revolutionary: "Change does not take place from edicts hanging on a wall—it takes place through conversations every day."

EVERY COMPANY IS UNIQUE

"No two companies in the entire universe are the same", Dave insists. "They are the sum total of all the people and their behaviours, and that creates the personality of that company. We have to appreciate that, and also know that when change meets culture, culture will trump change, every time." This obviously, implies time, time that can be hard to find, but Dave is upbeat: "So you have to start now to make changes that will take effect four or even five years out.