

# LEADING EXCELLENCE BOOK CASE STUDY



**MAURO NEVES - FROM BHP EXEC TO CEO  
AT INCITEC PIVOT**

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# MAURO NEVES

## ENGAGING HEART, BODY AND MIND.

Mauro Neves grew up and entered the workforce in Brazil. Early on in his career, he became passionate about continuous improvement. He started reading and studying organisations deploying continuous improvement tools and techniques. Mauro was working in the mining industry and had worked his way to leading procurement, planning, global infrastructure, and CI. Even though Mauro had an extensive portfolio as a leader, he had a passion for continuous improvement. Every chance he had, he would read a new book on a continuous improvement technique or visit other organisations deploying CI techniques.

Mauro faced resistance within mining to adopt continuous improvement techniques. The techniques he was trying to implement were prominent within the automotive industry and manufacturing, but not mining. He struggled to get people within his mining organisation to connect with and embrace approaches not typical in that industry; they were seen as something done in other sectors, not our own. Mauro was frustrated about how to connect the dots within mining and how to inspire people in a way that they could relate to what he was trying to implement.

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Mauro had the opportunity to visit Toyota's Motomachi production plant in Japan. It was part of a study group travelling to Japan to learn. During the site visit, Mauro saw all the great tools and techniques of continuous improvement, all the things Toyota were famous for implementing. He was desperate to get a few minutes with a senior leader of the Toyota Production System for the site to get hold of their TPS manuals and details on how it is deployed. The moment came when he found himself with the exact leader he wanted to talk to. He asked the TPS leader if he could get the TPS manual and plan details on how it is deployed and implemented.

The leader looked at him and said he knew a person in Brazil who led the Ford production system could provide him with manuals of their program. Mauro was stunned; he had travelled to Japan, spent all this money, and invested all this time to be told to return to Brazil and talk to Ford.

The Toyota leader must have seen the confusion on Mauro's face. He told him, Mauro, if you want manuals, it is best to get manuals from a manufacturer in Brazil; they are in your language and will provide you with what you are looking for. Continuous improvement is not about manuals and plans. It is about culture, a way of working rather than systems, processes, and tools. Manuals and plans have a part to play, but that is not the core of what makes companies unique. It clicked for Mauro; as a leader, he had been so focused on tools and techniques, implementing the latest process or tool rather than culture. This was a turning point for Mauro's leadership career.

Early on, Mauro connected with some allies to help him on the journey. He met the local continuous improvement manager, a Columbian lady who, up until this time, was treated as a sidekick on site. Mauro remembers the passion and energy he felt from this employee when he first met her. He was immediately impressed. He said to her that he had good and bad news for her. He said that she had his attention and to buckle up for a ride that would be tough but would ultimately make a genuine difference to the people of the site.

Mauro was embracing other leaders who serve, adaptive leaders willing to focus on helping others engage and grow towards their potential. Mauro also collaborated with some Australian leaders from different parts of the organisation. Leaders who were forming a cultural approach to engagement and continuous improvement within the broader group. This small team became a guiding alliance for what was to be achieved within the group.



Mauro and his team focused on creating an on-site bottom-up continuous improvement approach that engaged every employee's heart, body and mind. Mauro conducted many look-listen-learner walks to the front line, went to lunchrooms at break time, went to front-line work areas and engaged with employees to understand.

As mentioned, a high level of industrial action was happening when Mauro joined the organisation. He admits there was some initial tension around what he would be caught up in and what would be targeted at him when he went to the front line. This came to the fore when he met a group of front-line employees who said directly to him that they wanted to meet with him. Mauro thought to himself, what do I have to lose? When he met with the small group, he found that they didn't want to beat him up about pay rates and other gripes; they wanted to talk to him about some improvements they felt would help with safety and the flow of work around the site.

Mauro proved to be an adaptive leader at that moment. He paused and thought about the people he was with and the context surrounding them. They were longer-term employees who seemed engaged and wanted to make a difference. He considered the context that they could be the starting point for their cultural and performance improvement. Mauro chose the coaching hat and said to them,

***"What if I give you the time, authority and resources to go and fix those problems?"***

**Now they were silent; no one had ever said that to them before; one of them smiled and said why not? Let's give it a go!**

This small group of employees became the site's pioneers. They kicked off the small autonomous team approach on-site to embrace continuous improvement and make a difference for themselves and others.

Mauro kicked up his adaptive leader approach, wearing the inspire, support and coach hats with this team to ensure they felt supported, issues were overcome, and their efforts were promoted across the site and with his leadership team. Mauro focused on training his leadership team on the approach by leading by example and running presentations led by the pioneer group and others as they made improvements on-site. The work of the pioneer group became well-known, and other small teams started to form. It was an opt-in approach; employees were not forced to form autonomous small teams.



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Each team formed was given strong adaptive leader support from Mauro and the leadership team. All hats of the adaptive leader were worn (limited direct hat) to build team inspiration and capability and help them overcome challenges.

Mauro's leadership team started to measure the number of autonomous improvement teams active on-site. They actively avoided measuring dollars saved or productivity gained through the improvement efforts, although they knew this was large. They wanted to focus on the leading measures, the true measures that indicated the movement was gaining momentum.

Mauro's efforts to recognise teams and promote the transformation went as far as the regular Christmas musical group being dropped and replaced by an autonomous site team that was made up of musicians. When a family site visit day was planned, one small team had the idea of putting QR codes at each improvement area that family members could scan to enable them to see the improvement plan on a page together with other photos and resources on their phones. During the family site visit day, employees took great pride in bringing their family members to improvement areas so they could scan the QR code and learn more about what and how it was achieved.



Teams started to socialise outside work, starting with sporting teams, having BBQs, and collaborating in many ways. This effort of keeping the autonomous improvement teams visible, part of every event agenda on site, led to more and more Autonomous teams forming. The only element of approval these teams needed was if their improvement had or could lead to safety risks or impact culture negatively. The movement started with the small pioneer group and, at last count, involved more than 3000 people in small autonomous teams.

Mauro mentions that this was not a quick fix; it was five years of effort, starting from the pioneer team and ending with the site winning the prestigious Shingo Prize for Enterprise Excellence. Mauro is now the CEO of Incitec Pivot, a global leader in the resources and agriculture sectors. Mauro will continue to lead transformations as he did in the mining sector to help engage people at work, bring out their creativity and energy through being an adaptive leader, and bring out the best in them to create a better outcome for everyone.



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