

AN EXECUTIVE GUIDE FOR MANUFACTURING LEADERS

Getting Approval to Fix the **Systems** Slowing Your Team Down

*Most organizations don't need another initiative.
They need better systems.*

A practical guide for leaders who see operational bottlenecks and want to modernize them, and who need the business case to get it approved.

Cheryl Thompson

FORD · AMERICAN AXLE · TOOL & DIE · SIX SIGMA BLACK BELT · MBA

From the Floor, Not the Slide Deck

I came up from the floor at Ford through a tool and die apprenticeship, into engineering, and into manufacturing operations leadership at Ford and American Axle. I ran program launches, sat in customer audits, and owned the numbers that get you called into the Monday meeting: PPM, scrap, on-time delivery, and whether the PPAP went out clean.



So I know how this actually goes. The work instruction gets revised on first shift and never reaches second, and the defect comes back. The one person who knows the customer portal takes a week off, and three submissions stall. The SOP everyone signed off on is two revisions out of date, so people work from memory instead.

None of that is a people problem. Your team works hard. It is a systems problem. The know-how lives in people's heads and on someone's desktop instead of in something the team can use. What stops most leaders from fixing it isn't the work. It is getting approval. This guide gives you a way to find the right problem, put it in business terms, and bring it forward so it gets a yes.

WHAT I HELP WITH

SOPs and training, onboarding, PPAP and RFQ documentation, supplier scorecards, program follow-up, status reporting, knowledge transfer. Turning operational know-how into systems your team uses, with practical AI only where it earns its place.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Manufacturing, operations, and quality leaders. HR and training leaders. Program managers. Small and mid-sized manufacturers, where a handful of good systems decide the quarter.

The goal isn't a bigger program. It's one fixed system, approved, and a result you can point to.

Before You Ask

Don't start with technology. Start with the friction.

The fastest way to lose a room is to walk in asking for a tool. The fastest way to win one is to name a problem everyone already feels. Before you ask for anything, walk the work and ask these five questions.

1 Where are people wasting time?

The recurring work that eats hours and produces nothing new, like rekeying the same data into three systems.

2 What requires constant follow-up?

The status chasing, the reminders, the "did the supplier send the corrective action yet" loops.

3 What depends on tribal knowledge?

The job only one person does right, like the programmer who knows the CMM or the planner who knows the customer portal.

4 What breaks when one person leaves?

The process quietly resting on a single set of hands, until that person retires or takes a week off.

5 What gets rebuilt every time?

The quote, the PPAP package, the training, started from scratch on every cycle.

Those are your modernization opportunities. Not the technology you might use. The friction you can already point to.

Operational Problems That Get Approved

Approval follows pain the business can see and feel. Frame your request as one of these, and the conversation gets easier.

HIGH-APPROVAL PROBLEMS

- ✓ SOPs nobody follows
- ✓ Training dependent on one expert
- ✓ Manual status reporting
- ✓ Supplier follow-up chaos
- ✓ Onboarding that takes months
- ✓ Documentation that can't be found
- ✓ RFQs rebuilt from scratch
- ✓ Knowledge loss from turnover

LOW-APPROVAL PROBLEMS

We want AI

We want innovation

We want to experiment

We want to be ahead of competitors

These are ambitions, not problems. They have no owner, no cost, and no obvious finish line. So they wait.

Leaders fund problems. Not technologies.

The Cost of Living With It

"We don't have budget" usually means "we're already paying, in a different column."

Every friction has a price. You are paying it now, in hours, rework, and risk. You just aren't counting it. Before you ask for budget, put a number on what staying the same costs. Here is the math, in plain terms.

1 · TIME YOU'RE ALREADY SPENDING

Two people spending half a day a week chasing and assembling status is about 50 working days a year. Put your own labor rate on it.

2 · REWORK AND ESCAPES

One work instruction that didn't reach second shift. One defect that ships. One customer complaint. You already know what a single escape costs you in sort, containment, and trust.

3 · RISK THAT STAYS HIDDEN UNTIL IT'S EXPENSIVE

The knowledge that walks out when a veteran retires. The PPAP that stalls because the last one can't be found. The audit finding you could have prevented.

You don't need a perfect number. You need an honest one. **"This is costing us roughly X a year"** turns a soft request into a business decision. That is the sentence that gets funded.

How to Build the Business Case

Short, concrete, and in their language.

A strong case fits on one page. Show the work as it runs today, show how it should run, and name the impact in terms the business already tracks. The same shape works for any function. Here is one worked all the way through.

CURRENT STATE

Two program managers spend every Friday chasing updates by phone and email, then hand-assembling them for the Monday review. Most of a day a week, each.

FUTURE STATE

Updates are pulled together and summarized automatically. The items that need attention escalate on their own, before Monday.

Fewer meetings

Faster decisions

Better visibility

Two days a week, back

SOPs & training

From a binder nobody trusts to current instructions on the floor, in the words the operator uses.

Supplier management

From spreadsheets forwarded the night before to one scorecard that's current and shared.

PPAP & RFQ

From rebuilding every package by hand to pulling from what you've already approved.

Keep it to one page. Current state, future state, the impact in hours and risk, and the cost from the page before. If a manager can read it in two minutes and picture the change, you are most of the way to a yes.

Objections You'll Hear

A handful of objections come up almost every time. None of them is a real wall.

"We don't have time."

You already spend the time. The question is whether you're spending it fixing the problem or living with it.

"We don't have budget."

Start with one system. Don't fund transformation. Fund improvement. And you have already put a number on what living with it costs.

"We already have software."

Most operational problems are not software problems. They are workflow, documentation, communication, and adoption problems. New software rarely fixes those on its own.

"We tried this before and it didn't stick."

Usually it didn't stick because someone wrote a document and walked away. A system sticks when it's built into how the work already runs, and the people who do the work helped shape it. That's the difference between a binder and a system people use.

The Six Systems Behind How Work Gets Done

When work slows down, it's almost never one broken thing. It's a system that was never built, so it lives in people's heads and on someone's desktop. There are six. Three build your people's capability. Three move the work. Find the one with the loudest pain, and you've found your first project.

PEOPLE & CAPABILITY

Training & Workforce Capability

COVERS facilitator guides, speaker notes, train-the-trainer, workshop materials, skills matrices

From training that lives in one veteran's head to training built once and delivered consistently by anyone.

Onboarding & New Employee Readiness

COVERS onboarding paths, first-90-day structure, role readiness, ramp plans

From shadowing your busiest person for months to a repeatable path that gets someone productive in weeks.

Knowledge Transfer

COVERS mission-critical skills held by one person, veteran judgment, cross-training, retirement risk

From know-how that depends on a single set of hands to know-how the next person can use.

WORK & EXECUTION

Documentation & Technical Content

COVERS SOPs, work instructions, RFQs, PPAP packages, supplier scorecards, control plans

From documents out of date and rebuilt from scratch to current, findable content pulled from what you've approved.

Program & Project Execution

COVERS status reporting, program follow-up, launch tracking, milestone visibility

From Friday lost to chasing updates to status assembled automatically, exceptions escalated before Monday.

Communication & Coordination

COVERS shift-to-shift handoffs, supplier and customer follow-up, escalation paths

From information stuck in inboxes to handoffs that run on a system, not on someone remembering.

None of these is a technology project. Each one takes know-how that already exists and turns it into a system the team can use. AI helps with some of them. It is never the point.

Start With One System

Don't modernize everything. Pick the system where the pain is loudest.

The instinct is to fix it all at once. Resist it. Pick one of the six, fix one thing inside it well, and let the result make the argument for the next. Choose where two things overlap: the friction people complain about most, and a win a manager can see within a few weeks.

THE PATTERN THAT WORKS

Create one visible win. Something a manager can point to and a team can feel within a few weeks. Then expand. A proven result is the easiest budget request you will ever make.

One fixed system changes how the next conversation goes. You stop asking people to imagine the benefit, and start showing it.

YOUR FIRST MOVE

Where to Start

You don't have to fix everything. Pick the problem that's costing you the most right now, build the case, and get it approved. One fixed system changes how the next conversation goes.

Two ways I can help.

AI Working Session

55 minutes | \$500

Bring the thing on your plate. The stalled project, the process that eats your week, the task you keep pushing to tomorrow. We work on it together, live. You leave with a personalized way to handle it and a roadmap for what's next. Everything you leave with is yours to keep.

The Six Systems Sprint

6 weeks | Founding cohort: \$2,997 / company, team of three

Six weeks, six systems. Three people from your company join a small cross-company cohort and build, week by week, the six systems behind how your work gets done. Everything they build is yours to keep. Dates announced soon.

Start at cherylthompson.net



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