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To win this race, it is crucial for every part of a company, including maintenance, to keep itself fit and totally committed to a lean lifestyle.

Lean manufacturing initiatives,much like diets, are designed to trim fat and make you fitter, faster and more competitive-in short, a high performer. The overall goal is the lasting improvement in company profitability that underpins high performance. This is achieved by fighting flab of all sorts, from excess inventory to overextended equipment set-up times. The benefits can be dramatic.

Building flexibility into manufacturing processes and facilities and integrating and coordinating your overall supply chain network will simplify and speed up product flow and facilitate just-in-time delivery. A slimmer supply chain, in turn, will optimize the alignment of product capabilities with what customers actually want.

Studies indicate that more than half of all U.S. manufacturers have embarked on some kind of lean manufacturing initiative. Far fewer actually have achieved lasting profit improvement.

Much like fad dieters, most companies simply don't stay the course. They fail to recognize that long-term success hinges crucially on a full commitment to a totally new and fitter lifestyle.

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