



Event: GEMBA Walk at Zingerman's Mail Order

Speakers: Tom Root

Date: March 5, 2014

Location: Zingerman's Mail Order in Ann Arbor, MI

**We want to thank Zingerman's Mail Order
For their generosity for sponsoring this fantastic event!**



The Michigan Lean Consortium (MLC) partnered with Zingerman's on March 5, 2014 for a GEMBA Walk at Zingerman's Mail Order.

We had the great opportunity to tour Zingerman's Mail Order in Ann Arbor for an active gemba walk. Tom Root, Managing Partner, explained the Zingerman's culture and led the tour. Attendees filled out gemba forms and gave real time feedback on what they think is working well and suggestions for improvement. Attendees learned about Zingerman's lean journey and saw their lean practices in action. They also got to talk to Zingerman's employees about their lean journeys and what it is really like to work at Zingerman's Mail Order.

20 people attended this event in Ann Arbor.

Speaker Bios:



Tom Root grew up near Youngstown, OH with a passion for business and entrepreneurship. After graduating from Miami University in 1993, he became a certified business counselor for the state of Michigan, counseling entrepreneurs on business plan development and capital acquisition through the SBA's Small Business Development Center program. Tom



specialized in computer and software start-ups, and at the same time ran a consulting company to advise clients on website development.

In January of 1995 Tom became the first employee of Online Technologies Corporation, where he was Director of Development and Training. Over the next year he taught weekly classes through Walsh College and led the development of over 100 websites. During one of his teaching sessions, Tom was introduced to a team of people who had been charged with the creation of a website for a Michigan public electric utility, Detroit Edison. By February 1996 Tom was the principal web application developer for Detroit Edison. During his three years at Edison he managed a budget of over \$1 million per year and organized a team of seven to create and manage Edison's eight external web sites and its 50,000 page Intranet.

In January of 1999, while attending a food conference in San Francisco with his wife (a manager at Zingerman's Delicatessen), Tom struck upon the idea for a Zingerman's website and began the process of becoming a Zingerman's Managing Partner. On September 22, 1999 Zingermans.com took its first order, and Tom took on his first official role at Zingerman's as Chief Information Officer. During the next two years he introduced Zingerman's to email, established a wide area network, connecting all the various Zingerman's locations and managed Zingermans.com (with lots of help from his co-Managing Partner and wife, Toni Morell!)

In 2002 Zingerman's Mail Order and Zingermans.com merged and Tom took on the role of Chief Financial Officer of the resulting business (known simply as Zingerman's Mail Order). As CFO, Tom has championed open book management and taken the lead on educating staff about the financial ins and outs of the business.

In 2004 Tom was introduced to the concepts of Lean Manufacturing popularized by Toyota. Building on his experience with open book finance, Tom worked to bring the philosophy of continuous improvement and waste elimination to Mail Order. For the last 10 years Tom has been practicing Lean thinking through process improvement, class development and teaching.

In 2008 Tom was inspired by the financial crisis to start Maker Works. Maker Works is 11,000 ft² manufacturing facility that is operated like a health club. Individuals or businesses purchase memberships to have access to high-tech tools like laser cutters, 3D printers and CNC plasma cutters. The mission of Maker Works is to democratize the tools of manufacturing to foster job creation, community and self-sustainability.

In September of 2013 Maker Works celebrated it's 2-year anniversary. We've attracted almost 500 members, added 16,000 ft² of tenant space and played a role in a handful of start-ups including Sight Machine, a venture funded computer vision start-up.



Betty Gratopp started at Zingerman's in 1997. She started as a front line employee and was promoted to Warehouse Manager. She started working with lean in 2003 by working with a the University of Michigan graduate student.



Debra Levantrosser is the founder and lead adviser of Arbed Solutions, a company dedicated to helping and teaching businesses to make positive, Lean changes to their work. She is the hostess of The Leaning Edge radio show on Michigan Business Network and is also co-founder and board member of the Michigan Lean Consortium, an organization utilizing Lean principles statewide to help rebuild the state's economy. She has over 20 years of executive business experience in companies of all sizes leading strategic and tactical problem-solving efforts using a continuous improvement mindset. Industries in which she has worked include automotive, health care, food service, consulting and her own companies which focused on product design. She is now focusing on implementing lean in the food truck business.

[See photos from the event on Facebook.](#)

The mission of the MLC is to offer a diverse network of knowledgeable lean professionals who come together to share innovative practices. The organization aims to create a lean culture in Michigan to ensure sustainable competitive advantage, which could translate into healthier businesses that offer more job opportunities leading to economic growth in the state.