

# LEADERSHIP

F O R U M

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*A note from Steven Wolf, AIA, Target Corporation, 2011 Leadership FORUM Graduate*

The first two summers of college I worked in a green bean canning plant. Specifically, I was a mechanic in the “Fill and Close” department. Empty cans shuffled and clattered their way along raised tracks from one room while cooked, cut, and sorted beans pumped in from tubes descending from the department above. The cans and beans combined in a great spinning whirlwind of violent machinery and seasoned brine. Sealed cans of full beans emerged out of conveyors at the back of these machines. As a mechanic, my day was spent fixing the sealing machines when they broke or jammed. There was always something broken or jammed.

I was equipped with a bright yellow hard hat which identified me as a summer seasonal worker, a pair of thick rubber gloves and a pair of steel toed boots. I also had a tool belt containing two tools; a channel lock pliers and a screwdriver as long as my forearm. With this equipment I had to unjam smashed cans of beans, replace sheared cotter pins, unstick stuck can lids, and generally do my level-headed best to keep the machines running. If the machines weren't running, the beans backed up.

You did not want the beans to back up.

There inevitably came times, however, when my most valiant attempts to fix a broken machine proved unsuccessful. At these times, I called in a white hat.

Unlike us seasonal yellow hats who made up the majority of the summer workforce, white hats were the few fulltime, year round employees of the plant. When a white hat came to fix something, they came with TOOLS. Not just pliers and a screwdriver. They came with a thundering rolling cart of tools in shelves and drawers and doors and racks. These were the select few who spent their winters tearing down and rebuilding machines. To them, the machines had names. Old Number 7. Bess. The Beast. When a machine was broke, really catastrophically broke, white hats soon had it up and growling along in its typical floor tremoring fashion.

How does this relate to the AIA Leadership Forum? In a word: **Tools**.

The lectures, conversations, and books to which I've been exposed these last six months have ultimately given me new tools. A virtual rolling cart of leadership tools. Tools to communicate. Tools to inspire. Tools to lead. Tools to take full advantage of opportunities as they arise.

With these tools, I get to wear the white hat.