



Implementing LeanSigma™

By Bonnie Smith, Director of LeanSigma

A very smart engineer called me recently about a problem he was having – a troubling bit of finishing work on a stone. After a while in conversation, I could see that we had an even larger issue to work out involving awareness.

In his mind, LeanSigma was a tool kit he could rent from us in order to attack a few key projects at his company. He looked at the full range of issues he faced – lead time, market share, materials replenishment, personnel retention – and against that broad array of distractions, he saw his quality problems as isolated dilemmas. Why not just buy consulting from a LeanSigma black-belt consultant for a few weeks, attack the issues one by one and move on to the next crisis?

Now, we could get a black belt in there, address the problem as the engineer saw it, and the one problem would be fixed. But I felt I would be doing a disservice to this nice engineer to let him walk that path.

I knew my colleagues at TBM would feel the same. This is a company that focuses on transferring our knowledge to others; we want our client/partners to take control of their own destinies. For the engineer, this means that the best thing for him would be to become a black belt himself, to learn the tools and techniques of LeanSigma.

Without the deep understanding of LeanSigma's statistical tools, the data-driven discipline surrounding problem solving, my engineer friend could never be sure that he truly knew the nature of his problem. He might believe that he had an issue in finishing and send a team of engineers in to attack that area, when he didn't really have the data to come to that conclusion. A fully trained LeanSigma black belt might look at the same situation, collect and analyze the team's data and concentrate his efforts in a wash cycle that was two

steps before finishing.

The point is, LeanSigma is not just about quality problem solving; it's also about knowing where to look. And it's about having a culture that supports data collecting and analyzing and action-oriented investigations.

In my opinion, the best way for my engineer to get the support he needs, and his quality issues to get the attention they deserve, is for senior executives and managers to also get on board. That's why we set up a model launch for LeanSigma programs that includes Champion, Black Belt and Green Belt training – because all levels of an organization must buy-in to make it successful. And the quicker the better.

For executives, it's key that they not only learn the tools and techniques of LeanSigma in the five-day training course, but that they develop the vision and deployment strategy for LeanSigma. In Champion Training, executives assess their current metrics and then focus on defining the business objectives that will drive the projects.

In Champion Training, executives might hand pick their first group of black belts, ensuring that the front-line change agents get the support and resources they require. They will know what training is involved to become a green belt and know the difference between the two types of projects. There will be alignment and shared vision within the organization.

We could arrange for a la carte consulting, but I would prefer to arrange for success.