

Maximizing Six Sigma ROI

Preparing Your Organization as well as your Black Belts

From top to bottom, the first page of the file I maintain on leadership notes is filled with words of wisdom that I have heard or read throughout my career and wanted to implement. Many of these phrases have so often proven to be true (and useful) that they have become guiding principles.

As I considered possible outlines for this article, I found several of these guiding principles to be applicable when considering the ROI (return on investment) from Six Sigma initiatives. As you will see below, ten of these principles can be used to guide your Six Sigma implementation plans. The first principle to consider:

I. If I impose my decision on you, you will not like it.

One of the overriding misconceptions of the Six Sigma era is that all you have to do is certify a few Black Belts. You then give them a list of problems selected by your executive team and announce to the organization that you are implementing and supporting Six Sigma. The Black Belts are then sent into in your organization to solve those problems. *We will impose Six Sigma on you!*

Organizations that implement Six Sigma programs in this manner may (likely will) see initial results. However, they will not be able to fully take advantage of Six Sigma without the acceptance and informed participation of the rest of the organization. Everyone needs to understand the *Whys and Hows* of your Six Sigma implementation.

When the rest of your organization (not just the Black Belts) understands the basic tools of Six Sigma, every employee will be equipped to participate (not observe), and will soon begin applying these tools to their job processes. You will then have everyone driving continuous process improvement - not just your Black Belts.

Note, the goal is measurable process improvement, not simply the number of Black Belts in your organization.

Six Sigma will then become part of the language, processes and culture of your organization. This type of cultural shift is one that will deliver the full, long-term ROI that Six Sigma offers - and you have the right to expect.

We are not saying that everyone in the organization needs to be a Black Belt. We are suggesting that everyone in your organization needs to be involved in data collection,

use of process improvement tools and effective team participation to continuously improve your critical business processes.

The key to our Six Sigma projects being successful was that the frontline people were involved. With the TIPPS process improvement fundamentals training they received, they gained the confidence to participate in data collection, problem solving and continuous process improvement. Employees used to come into my office to tell me there was a problem. Now they come and tell me what the data is telling them. My problem generators are now my problem solvers. Our Six Sigma program involves EVERYONE.

Martin Wesemann
Division General Manager
Viking Range Corporation

The second principle to consider:

II. There will never be enough time.

Never has, never will be. If you impose Six Sigma on your organization, one of the likely responses you will hear from employees is that they do not have enough time in their day to be on a project team. You will also likely hear the satirical, *Flavor of the month* jibe tossed about.

When employees begin to integrate Six Sigma tools into their daily work life, it no longer becomes an add-on for which there is no time but part of the routine. All employees will begin to collect data, listen to the data, trust the data and use the data to drive corrective action and measurable continuous improvement.

Six Sigma is not a management project for a select few Black Belts. It is a way of life for all employees in an organization. Integrate Six Sigma into daily routines and there will always be time.

The third principle to consider:

III. Harvesting is the result of planting.

Principle III suggests you will achieve a more successful harvest if you plant the seeds of knowledge in both your workforce and your Black Belts.

Said another way: The more you plant, the more you harvest.

Implementing Six Sigma exclusively through Black Belts is analogous to an organization that has invested in certifying only two employees as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). Certainly having resident EMT skills can make a huge difference in emergency situations. However, what if you have two EMTs on day shift and run a three shift operation, what if others do the wrong things before the EMT arrives, what if employees handle routine injuries incorrectly?

The *What if...?* questions could go on and on. Relying solely on two EMTs for the health and safety of your organization is likely not the best approach. The more beneficial (ROI) and sustaining approach is to have a few highly skilled EMTs and also to train the rest of the organization in fundamental first-aid skills. This first-aid training would be integrated with a comprehensive health and safety education program. Doing so will allow health and safety to become part of the knowledge base of your entire organization.

To complete the analogy, the expertise of Black Belts, and EMTs, is critical to have and utilize. However, neither two EMTs alone nor a few Black Belts alone can create and maintain the health of an organization. Plant Six Sigma knowledge broadly and then harvest broadly!

The third principle to consider:

TIPPS began as a program to educate our employees about why world-class manufacturing was required and to teach the tools on how to get there. Once rooted, it rapidly grew and became a core competency program for all new employees. Today, it is the foundation and infrastructure of everything we do. With properly trained employees actively participating with our Black Belts, our Six Sigma project teams are developing more successful solutions and generating quicker results.

Doug Guthrie
Business Director
BD Lee Laboratories

The fourth principle to consider:

IV. I will only get what I want if I help others get what they want.

Having worked with many front-line employees for over twenty-years now, I know that they too want results. They too want excellence. Principle IV of our guiding principles suggests that if you want Six Sigma ROI, then help your employees achieve excellence. Provide everyone foundational skills and tools to achieve excellence - then you will get the ROI you are targeting.

Everyone wants a secure future, superior products and services, more profits to provide for earned wage increases, greater job and customer satisfaction, pride in what they do daily and the delight of accomplishment to replace the frustration of delays, rework and waste of all types – all which should be considered the production of scrap!

Everyone wants to be on a winning team. People - all people -- want to be part of excellence. Get what you want, by giving others what they want.

The fifth principle to consider:

V. Be the change you want others to be.

The applicability of this phrase is quite apparent if we dissect Principle V a bit and ask a question. It doesn't solely say, *Be the ENTIRE change*, does it? Are you asking your Black Belts to be *The Change*? The second part of Principle V is, *you want others to be*. This raises a question. Just who are these others that need to change too? How many employees need to be involved in continuous improvement? How many employees need to be linked to delighting your customers with continuously improving products and services?

Who, then, does not need to change? Which of your employees really isn't that important to your future? Is it the receptionist? No. Is it the person who ships your products? No. Is it the folks on third shift? No. Is it just...? No.

Be the change you want ALL others to be is the complete statement to remember and act upon. Certainly, use your Black Belts to lead the way in your Six Sigma implementation efforts by collecting data and following effective change processes. However, don't forget that the phrase doesn't say, *Be the change You want to be*, it is, *Be the change you want others to be*.

Yes, Black Belts are absolutely critical to your future. However, what is truly foundational for sustained continuous improvement success and ROI is the preparation and involvement of your entire organization. Who, again, in your organization is not important to your success?

For twenty years now I have been helping organizations build their foundations for success. I have learned that ROI is maximized when all employees are provided the tools and confidence to actively participate in continuous improvement of their work processes. Then organizations will reap the full benefit of Six Sigma - which everyone wants.

You too, can turn *good into great* by applying these principles as part of your Six Sigma strategy.

Here again is a list of the first five principles.

- I. If I impose my decision on you, you will not like it.**
- II. There will never be enough time.**
- III. Harvesting is the result of planting.**
- IV. I will only get what I want if I help others get what they want.**
- V. Be the change you want others to be.**

Without further comment on my part, I am certain you can develop the logic behind the next five principles of Lean and Six Sigma success. They are:

- VI. No one of us is as smart as all of us.**
- VII. If you want your employees to be involved and act like owners - you need to treat them like the owners they really are.**
- VIII. What is urgent will always take precedence over what is truly important.**
- IX. Success is not possible without failure.**
- X. People do not care about how much you know until they know how much you care.**

While some of the advanced concepts of Lean and Six Sigma can at times seem overwhelming, the fundamental principles we have outlined in this article, we believe are a necessary foundation for all process improvement initiatives. For more information, you may want to visit our website TIPPSWorks.com.

Catching the next corporate wave?

Purdue University's Krannert Magazine

My first exposure to "corporate waves" began decades ago with the promises of "quality circles." Thereafter, year after year, wave after wave hit the corporate beachhead. Waves, not unlike tsunamis, come with inspiring and convincing titles: the Total Quality wave, the waves of W. Edwards Deming and his statistical approaches, Joseph Juran's measuring with a customer perspective, Tom Peters and the value of a continuous-improvement culture, then self-directed teams, reengineering, learning organizations, and lean approaches.

Let's not forget APQP, TPS, 8D, black belts, fish, frogs, pickles, and, well, I'll let you fill in the rest - each industry had its own.



Without exception, each wave of programs left behind valuable flotsam and jetsam that corporate America used to achieve the quality and productivity improvements of the late 20th century. As we begin the 21st century, business consultants and executives everywhere are looking for the first tsunami of the century. I, too, look forward to its arrival. However, while waiting for the next tsunami and at the same time reinforcing the key concepts left over from past waves, let's not forget the foundation upon which all of these programs rest.

What is the set of foundational skills that every individual in organizational America must have in place for both personal and collective survival? That question ran through my mind as I sat on Cannon Beach on Oregon's coast and looked at a sign and siren for tsunami alerts. I'll admit to being addicted enough to what I do for a living that I had my laptop open as I watched the waves hit Haystack Rock.

If employees are not listening to each other, if employees do not realize that a positive attitude is critical to personal and corporate success, if the organization is focused on opinions rather than facts (yes, Deming was correct), if "good enough" is not replaced by focused, continuous process improvement, if Band-Aids are used to "fix" symptoms rather than addressing root causes (Ishikawa helped here), and if truly listening to internal as well as external customers is not happening in your organization, then it doesn't much matter what waves have hit or will hit the beachhead of your organization.

So, down the left side of a blank page, I typed A, B, C ... through Z. Just as every letter of the alphabet is critical for communication success, the question became,

"What is the equivalent alphabet for corporate survival and success?" It came together something like this:

A - ATTITUDE: I realized that in a book on work fundamentals, there must be a section that explains how critical a person's attitude is to success. Contrary to some popular self-help authors, I do not believe attitude is everything. But, WOW, it is a key ingredient. Some people haven't a clue how their attitude is tripping them up.

B - "BEFORES": The workplace phrase, "When they start paying me more, then I will start working more," is equivalent to a farmer's saying something like, "When this field starts producing more, than I will start working it harder." Only in the dictionary does "pay" come before "work." Every success that is seen has an unseen string of what I call "befores." (By the way, it was in a Purdue English class at Heavilon Hall that I learned one could make up words to suit a need.)

C - CUSTOMERS: What goes on inside an organization affects what goes out the door. People too often understand customer service to be an external function, not seeing why they should treat internal and external customers with the same level of respect and service. That had to be in the book.

I - IMPROVE: "Good enough" isn't. Process improvement, at both the continuous incremental and reengineering levels, is part of every job description. How many people did I know who sincerely thought his or her job was to "do," but "thinking" belonged to someone else? Lots! Do, do, do, and you end up with a lot of doo-doo.

L - LISTENING: How many people do you know who don't understand how to really listen? Is it critical that everyone in the organization be aware of his/her listening skills? Can anyone's or any corporation's success ever be achieved and sustained without truly knowing how to listen? Which is more important to an organization's future: 1) "Speak up, we need your ideas," or 2) "Listen to the ideas of others"? Both.

T - TEAMS: Teams work. Groups of mismatched, ill-trained, undirected people don't. There is a reason you will find the word teamwork in the dictionary and not groupwork. Most people do not know what is critical for team success. They need to.

V - VALUES: There had to be a chapter that asks how any organization is going to benefit from its well-publicized set of corporate values if each individual does not have, and live by, a personal set of values. Do people think about how values apply to work? If not, perhaps we could help them develop a set of values or personal boundaries to guide them in making ethical decisions.

Z - ZERO DEFECTS: "Z" would have to be for explaining how six sigma is not a make-believe corporate goal but an absolute that must be achieved. In school, 90% was often a B grade, 99% was an A. In many industries, those kinds of numbers are an F grade. Unreasonable? Not if you are the consumer.

On it went until, from A to Z, there was a complete set of basic skills in place that could serve as the keel of the ship that would capitalize on the energy of each tsunami.

As I looked back through the alphabet of skills, it was evident that no organization will survive the 21st century without A - Z. The book became *Future @Work - An Employee Survival Guide for the 21st Century*.

Executives really are looking for the next tsunami - it looks good to the board, to senior management or on a resume to be riding the latest wave. Can you imagine a senior executive detailing his/her objectives for the upcoming year and stating: "I will personally ensure that each employee in our organization knows how to listen, how to study a process, how to monitor his/her attitude."? No, foundations are not often fancy and certainly not leading-edge. Yet, my experience is that for many organizations, a foundation is the missing key ingredient.

Well, there you have it. Nothing new.

I'd like to hear from you when you identify the first tsunami of the 21st century. I'll ask how this new tsunami will survive and make a real difference if you do not have people who listen to each other. Then I'll ask whether this new tsunami will be implemented and evaluated based upon facts rather than opinions. I'll also ask if your implementation teams are effective, and how you know. You get the point.

Until then, I am going back into the classroom. I'll be teaching foundational process improvement, problem solving, values, and attitudes. With all this interest in building foundations, maybe I should have been a civil engineer...? Nah.

Students Learn ABC's of Job Success

The Monroe Evening News

Some high school students in Ida and Erie got an eye-opening lesson in their ABCs Thursday -an alphabet of skills designed to spell "career success."

Nick Synko, a corporate trainer and consultant, spoke to students in careers and work skills classes at Ida High School and Mason High School in Erie. A former Tenneco Inc. trainer, the Saline resident is the author of "Future@Work - An Employee Survival Guide for the 21st Century."

The 180-page soft cover book is meant for workers and students and was compiled from Mr. Synko's knowledge of the skills and traits employers seek when they hire workers.

It covers the alphabet from "Attitude" to "Zero Defects," and Mr. Synko used anecdotes, examples and cartoon panels contained in the book to get his message across to students Thursday.

"Attitude is absolutely a job skill that is more important than almost anything else," he said. "Employers hire positive attitudes just as much or more as they hire the skill."

"People can't hide attitudes, and (job) interviewers notice attitudes," he said.

He called attitude the great multiplier. "Whatever you do is always multiplied by your attitude," he said. As in any multiplication formula, those with a negative attitude will generate a negative result.

He also shattered some definitions of excellence. Getting 99 percent on a test in school usually results in an A, he said, "but when you get into world-class organizations, you will find that 99 percent is an F." That goes for any number of other professions, he continued. For example, he said, an electrician can wire 100 new homes. If he wires 99 correctly and one burns down, he's failed. The same goes for cosmetologists, caterers, medical personnel and others.

Mr. Synko also stressed that students shouldn't expect rewards without work, "It's only in the dictionary that 'pay' comes before 'work'," he said. He said many employees fall into the trap of being unwilling to make any extra effort unless they are paid more first. He compared that to a farmer expecting to reap a bountiful harvest before tilling the soil and planting seeds.

He discussed organizational skills effective employees use. Chapter "K," for example, stresses the need to "keep" a pencil and paper handy. One of his past bosses once told him, "I will fire you on the spot if I ever catch you without a pencil and paper," he said. The idea is that employees will jot down information that they can't afford to forget. "I forgot," doesn't cut it as an excuse in the work world, he said. "Do you want a doctor who says, 'Oh, I forgot?'"

Communication skills are important in the work world, he said, and one of those skills is "listening."

"People who are excellent listeners have a skill that is highly valued."

The Monroe County Intermediate School District's Career-Technical Education Services organized Mr. Synko's appearance.

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Future@Work

Getting back to ABCs!

What will the 21st Century work world look like? What skills will be necessary to meet the fast-paced demands of new ideas and new expectations? Will you be ready to meet the challenge? Do you have the skills? Do you have the attitude?

Future@Work may be the key!

Join author Nick Synko as he draws on decades of experience in professional development in this enjoyable workshop

covering the essential A-to-Z skills he thinks are necessary for the 21st

century. Based on his best selling book, *Future@Work: An Employee Survival Guide for the 21st Century*, Nick will explore his energizing concepts and more in this new half-day workshop on Thursday, May 9, 2002 at Washtenaw Community College.

'A' is for 'Attitude'...

Future@Work is full of practical, applicable skills organized alphabetically so they couldn't be easier to learn and live.

About the presenter

Nick Synko is a business consultant, author, training program designer, and professional speaker with 30 years of experience. Formerly the manager of executive and professional development for a 15,000-person company, he now operates Synko & Associates, a Saline-based consulting and training firm specializing in the development of individual, team, and leadership skills. Current clients range from major divisions of multinational firms to companies of fewer than 100 employees representing such industries as automotive manufacturing, biomedical products, medical devices and supplies, electronics, computer assembly, oil and gas, and metals, as well as nonprofit organizations.

Do you have the 'Attitude' and the advantage of a positive outlook? The 'B' means 'Before' - work before reward. 'C' is for 'Customers' and the importance of recognizing the ones inside as well as outside your organization. And 'D' is for 'Do It Now' - don't hesitate to take the steps you need to ensure your success.

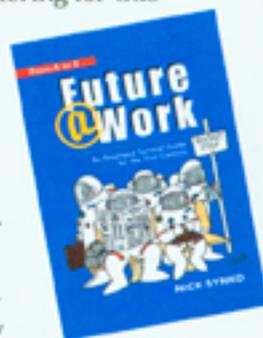
Signing up for this workshop could be one of those steps!

Book with registration

A copy of *Future@Work* - a \$19.95 value - is yours as part of registering for this workshop. This soft-bound publication is an essential guide to the fundamental skills and concepts you'll need to survive and thrive in a 21st century workplace.

Who should attend

This workshop will provide employees at every level in the organization, the knowledge that they need to compete as strong team members in jobs and companies that will become the economic foundation of the 21st century.



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