

# Six Sigma Shortcuts

You can implement Six Sigma however you wish—just don't expect grand results.

I often receive e-mail and phone calls from people whose management has expressed an interest in Six Sigma but doesn't like the approach (i.e., hard work and dedication from the top down) used by pioneering companies such as Motorola, GE, AlliedSignal, Texas Instruments and others. When I suggest that people not proceed until they can persuade their leadership to do it right, I'm often told that they must forge ahead anyway. This message is conveyed with a great deal of weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. As you might imagine, this can get depressing after a while, so, in an attempt



to preserve my sanity, I'm writing a column for those of my readers who want to hear that it's OK to take shortcuts: If implementation for its own sake is what you're

after—not long-term results—you can devote just as little effort to a Six Sigma program as you want. So please, before contacting me, see if the shortcut you want to take is already on the following list.

■ *Ignore the customer.* Some companies spend a lot of time and money getting customer input only to find that customer requirements are maddeningly vague and difficult to translate into internal requirements, goals and Six Sigma projects. You can avoid this hassle by simply skipping this step. Besides, what the customer wants is obvious anyway.

■ *Start Six Sigma at the bottom or the middle of the organization.* CEOs such as Bob Galvin, Larry Bossidy and Jack Welch spent a lot of time on Six Sigma. But unlike these slackers, your executives are too busy to give it more than lip service. That's OK, as long as you write some really good lines for them to read in their speeches. Start Six Sigma wherever you want; just be sure to give top management credit for any successes.

■ *Don't change the incentives for managers.* Managers will always do what's best for the organization, even if it has an adverse impact on them personally and professionally.

■ *Do it on the cheap.* Is it really necessary to provide 160–240 hours of Black Belt training? Of course not. Try the “compressed” training programs that offer four weeks of training in only two weeks, or an Internet course that only takes a couple of weekends. Also, be sure to hire the consultant who submits the lowest bid. Better still, just go it alone: Just think of the savings!

■ *Don't integrate Six Sigma with other initiatives.* If you're already working on lean and a half-dozen other programs, just add Six Sigma to the mix. Your people are smart enough to figure out how these programs relate to one another.

■ *Try it on a small scale to see if it works.* Six Sigma is a proven success in organizations of all sizes in a wide variety of service and manufacturing industries. But your organization is unique, so who knows if it will work for you? To prove it will work for you, try a small-scale pilot. Of course, a pilot will be too small to command attention from top management, none of the major management systems can be changed for the pilot, the supporting infrastructure won't be there for the team, and so on. But don't sweat the small stuff; your people can make it succeed.

■ *Don't worry about documenting the bottom-line impact of projects.* When you do TQM projects, it's enough to show that you made quality better by reducing defects. What's wrong with that? Besides, it takes a lot of time to figure out real savings, and that time isn't value-added. Don't worry about skeptics challenging the value of Six Sigma in the future; what are the odds of that happening?

■ *Let the quality department lead the effort.* Six Sigma uses many quality improvement tools already known to qual-

ity specialists. Why waste time and money by teaching these tools to others?

■ *Emphasize statistical skills when choosing Black Belt candidates.* Those “soft” change-agent skills can be picked up by anyone with half a brain. But statistics are “hard” skills. Drag the analysts from their computers and put them to work on the front line!

■ *Let the Black Belts report to local managers.* Successful companies believe that Black Belts have a difficult time disengaging from their routine work when they report to their old bosses. But, as your people do what's best for the company even if it isn't in their own best interest, that won't be a problem for you.

■ *Use part-time Black Belts.* Full-time Black Belts are difficult to extricate from their real jobs. Busy managers don't need this confusion. Avoid it by letting the Black Belts work on Six Sigma projects in their spare time.

■ *Don't set overly tight deadlines or ambitious goals for Black Belts.* Six Sigma might be viewed as ruthless if people are held to high standards. Cut the Black Belts some slack. If they're trying hard and doing their best, what more can you ask?

■ *Select projects based on local criteria.* Some companies waste time studying the entire customer value stream and then use Six Sigma to identify projects that will improve the system as a whole. But your manufacturing manager is ready to go now, while the others are still dragging their feet. It would take a lot of time to change that, and who needs that kind of grief? Take the path of least resistance.

## About the author

Thomas Pyzdek is a consultant in Six Sigma. He has written more than 50 books, software and training products, including *The Six Sigma Handbook* (McGraw-Hill). Learn more about Six Sigma at [www.pyzdek.com](http://www.pyzdek.com). E-mail Pyzdek at [tpyzdek@qualitydigest.com](mailto:tpyzdek@qualitydigest.com).

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