

May 22, 2001



## ASI (Adhesive and Sealants Industry)

### Getting It Right 99.99966% of the Time

By Karen Kramer

#### Editor's Memo

Having decided to write about Six Sigma, I did a quick search on the Google™ search engine, [www.google.com](http://www.google.com). Even though I came up with about 187,000 hits, it did not deter me. Nor is it preventing Jim Tira from Honeywell from talking about it in his presentation at our upcoming symposium on Adhesives for Product Assembly later this month. (See pages 100-101 for complete details.)

Word is out that some companies that have adopted the Six Sigma process have been disappointed in the results. That's why Subir Chowdhury wrote *The Power of Six Sigma: An Inspiring Tale of How Six Sigma Is Transforming the Way We Work* (Dearborn Trade, 2001, ISBN: 0-7931-4434-5, U.S. \$17.95, Canada \$26.95). Chowdhury is executive vice president of the American Supplier Institute and former chairman of the American Society for Quality's Automotive Division.

Using a fictional format, the story is told from the point of view of Joe Meter, a middle manager who has just been fired from the "burger" division of a franchise company, and his old friend and coworker Larry Hogan, who now has a successful career with the corporation's American Pizza branch.

Larry illustrates the Six Sigma process by telling how his company solved its underlying problems, increased its efficiency and, in the process, found profitable new ways to serve its customers. Their ensuing conversation delivers the message of the book.

"Six Sigma is a management philosophy focused on eliminating mistakes, waste and rework," explains Chowdhury. "It establishes a measurable status to achieve, and embodies a strategic problem-solving method to increase customer satisfaction and dramatically enhance the bottom line. It teaches your employees how to improve the way they do business, scientifically and fundamentally, and maintain their new performance level."

Sigma is a Greek letter used to designate a standard deviation. In business terms, it measures the capability of any given process to perform defect-free work. The higher the sigma value attained, the less likely that a process will produce defects. Six is the level of perfection that a Six Sigma company aims to achieve. The goal of the Six Sigma process is to make only 3.4 "mistakes" per every million activities, or to get it right 99.99966% of the time.

The power of Six Sigma, Chowdhury asserts, is People Power combined with Process Power.

The bulk of the work takes place in middle management. A company's most outstanding managers are chosen as "Black Belts," trained intensively in the Six Sigma philosophy, then given the support and the resources they need to work fulltime on a specific project. Once the deadlines have been met and numerical goals have been reached, a Black Belt moves on to other projects.

Process Power, the other part of the equation, encompasses five steps: Define the problem, Measure where you stand, Analyze where the problem starts, Improve the situation, and Control the new process to confirm that it's fixed. That's DMAIC, or as Chowdhury's Larry remembers it, "Dumb Managers Always Ignore Customers."

Chowdhury wrote this book because he wants employees at all levels of a corporation — from CEOs on down — to understand the true power behind Six Sigma.

**Karen Kramer - Editor in Chief, Adhesives & Sealants Industry**