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American Society for Quality honors Subir Chowdhury



■ Subir Chowdhury (center) with Peggy Crosby (Philip Crosby's widow) and Wayne Kost, Chairman, Crosby Medal Committee at the Annual Quality Congress at Kansas City, MO

Author of bestselling book on Six Sigma gets first Philip Crosby Medal

MONIKA JOSHI

It was Subir Chowdhury's dream that a book he was writing be as popular as Philip Crosby's *Quality is Free*, written over 20 years ago.

Chowdhury turned for advice to Crosby (1926-2001), his mentor and friend, who is regarded the father of the quality revolution. The latter told him not to publish the book till his audience understood what he was talking about.

Chowdhury sent his manuscript to the CEO of a multi-billion-dollar corporation, which had deployed Six Sigma — the subject of the book — but did not understand it well. He sought feedback from workers in the assembly line in the same firm whom he had approached before. He also gave the manuscript to the sales staff at a local JC Penney store.

From the feedback it was evident that the book, written in story format, made the concept amply clear. The day he got the feedback, Chowdhury released the book for publishing.

His book, *The Power of Six Sigma: An Inspiring Tale of How Six Sigma is Transforming the Way We Work*, was published in 2001; it has sold over a million copies and been translated into 20 languages.

June 12, the American Society for Quality awarded the first Philip B Crosby Medal to Chowdhury 'for his passionate desire and commitment to help companies and organizations understand and communicate the true power behind the Six Sigma quality methodology.' ASQ is a leading professional society supporting quality education and practice.

'Chowdhury's book, *The Power of Six Sigma*, has made a significant impact on the way organizations, both large and small, in a variety of industries, educate their workforce,' the citation said.

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Chowdhury, who has also authored *The Power of Design for Six Sigma* (2003) and *Design for Six Sigma* (2002), says most global Fortune 1,000 companies are adopting Six Sigma or doing something around it.

"The book is used by companies from GE to Ford Motor Company to Xerox," Chowdhury, chairman and CEO, American Supplier Institute Consulting Group, said over the phone from Michigan.

Harvard Business School recently teamed with him to host a Six Sigma leadership conference that was attended by executives from Rolls Royce, Coca-Cola and others. "All kind of companies — small, medium and large — are getting into it," he says.

Chowdhury says it could be applied to New York City, where billions of dollars could go waste because of unpreparedness in the event of a snowstorm. "They can correctly predict — this given year, this much of salt will be needed at any given time," he says.

In healthcare, Six Sigma could reduce emergency waiting time substantially.

Chowdhury says a healthcare company he worked with had an emergency waiting time of two hours.

"That hospital might be 10 times worse than a hospital in Kolkata, where emergency support time may be two minutes," he says.

Six Sigma can help reduce that time to one and a half minutes.

Chowdhury's company is one of the leaders in Six Sigma implementation consulting and training.

It is the CEO who must lead the initiative, he says. "If the CEO decides, 'Okay, I want to do Six Sigma, but hey, VP, quality, can you do it?' They are going to fail."

In black belt Six Sigma training, the person chosen should be handed a problem that has a financial impact of at least a quarter million dollars, he says.

One gets a week of training, and applies the tools learned to the process for about six weeks. Another week of training takes place, followed by implementation.

By the time one finishes the four weeks training, the project is over.

"Until you finish a project and show you solved a problem and saved a quarter of a million dollars, you cannot be certified as a black belt," Chowdhury says.

"If there are 20 people per class, they save \$5 million."

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