



# Bored by Lean

Apathy is a cancer that affects lean continued process improvement.

**D**espite the best intentions, people tire of everyday tasks, whether it's exercise, housecleaning, or mowing the lawn. Similarly, apathy creeps into all lean initiatives. Unless such apathy is strategically countered, it will metastasize throughout the organization.

Apathy is a state of indifference, which is diametrically opposed to the lean principle of continued process improvement. Apathy is a common reaction to stress, where it manifests as "learned helplessness" and is commonly associated with depression. For a lean initiative team, it reflects a lack of interest in things that team members don't consider important. Nothing improves when people stop caring.

*USA Today* recently profiled Textron CEO Lewis Campbell, who said, "Companies who couldn't make Six Sigma

work weren't doing it right." The feature acknowledged that the data-driven approach to problem solving recently came under fire, citing 3M's CEO George Buckley as the latest executive to de-emphasize Six Sigma. Buckley wondered if the methodology hurt the company's creativity. Conversely, Textron—a company headquartered in Providence, Rhode Island, whose products include Cessna jets and E-Z Go golf carts—launched a Six Sigma initiative in 2002. Since then, the company has seen its stock climb as high as 173 percent. Textron has trained 10,000 in-house Black Belts and Green Belts, according to *USA Today* corporate management reporter Del Jones. ("CEO Expects Good Things As Textron Does Six Sigma Right," [www.usatoday.com/money/companies/management/2008-01-20-six-sigma-textron\\_n.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/companies/management/2008-01-20-six-sigma-textron_n.htm)).



by Thomas R. Cutler

Whether using a lean Six Sigma quantification methodology or other lean-principled effort, it's always exciting when a program launches. The buy-in from members of the lean team is at its peak. Although arduous, *kaizen* events, developing measurable results, and defining metrics of improvement create a dynamic for change, improvement, participation, and purpose. According to Evan Miller, president of Goshen, Indiana-based Hertzler Systems Inc., "The key to success in the lean environment is discipline. Initially, many companies just

don't know how to manage projects. It's important to learn to set formal expectations, make promises, and set boundaries around how much you're going to try to accomplish."

### Eliminating lean apathy

Six months into a new lean initiative, people get tired. They're reacting the same way they do to their New Year's resolution to get to the gym every morning at 5 a.m.: By June it's become 6 a.m. twice a week. When this happens, it's time for some coaching—a fresh pair of eyes.

"One important discipline is a formal change-control process," Miller notes. "We need flexibility in our rapid-pace business world. Change control provides a process for prioritizing and managing the impact of those changes. It is one of the most important tools that control 'scope creep.'"

Indeed. When a project's metrics drag along with little result, apathy sets in and team members feel discouraged. Change control is an important tool to reempower the team.

### Provide results

In a data-driven culture, there are cost-effective ways to simultaneously collect and visualize critical data that allows members of a lean team to commit and recommit to continued process improvement. In a Six Sigma environment, the ability to anticipate these quantifiable measurements allows the project to continue in a consistent manner, as follows:

- Reduce costs and cycle times of Six Sigma projects by automatically collecting critical outcome data (critical Y) and the inputs that drive those outcomes (critical X).
- Focus attention on improvement goals through innovative defect-improvement charts in service and manufacturing businesses.
- Uncover hidden sources of variation using automated statistical tools.
- Drill down into data to identify significant opportunities for improvement.

### Know & Go

- Apathy is a state of indifference which is diametrically opposed to the lean principle of continued process improvement. The key to success in the lean environment is discipline.
- One important discipline is a formal change-control process. Change control provides a process for prioritizing and managing the effect of those changes.
- In a data-driven culture, cost-effective ways to collect and visualize critical data simultaneously allows members of a lean team to commit and recommit to the continued process improvement.
- Apathy can be anticipated in a lean effort; develop documented processes to ensure that all who serve on the team are passionate.
- As quality efforts pay off in reduced defect costs and consistently low defect levels, the next move is to implement variable statistical process control. Inspection costs are reduced by decreasing the size and frequency of samples inspected, and data also helps to evaluate the stability of the manufacturing process.

- Build an enterprise database with reliable data for Six Sigma initiatives.
- Connect with other information systems to streamline and reduce operational costs.

As Campbell said in Jones' article, "You define a problem, take measurement to be

crystal clear on what you're trying to improve, and analyze the data using statistical tools to sort through the noise. The last piece is control, so that once you fix something, it's fixed for the last time. The idea is to create output so predictable that there are only three defects per million [opportunities]."

### Prevention is key

Because apathy can be anticipated in a lean effort, documented processes can be developed to ensure that all team members retain their passion—the antithesis of apathy.

- **Rotate the team members.** It's unreasonable to ask the same team members to maintain the same level of enthusiasm for improve-

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ment over time. Limit the time any single member serves on a particular lean team; make it clear that the move isn't a punishment, and that their fresh eyes are needed somewhere else in the organization.

• **Hire lean consultants.** When the initial return on investment (ROI) of a lean initiative starts to fade, have a lean or Six Sigma consulting organization perform a scheduled gap analysis. Undoubtedly, they will find areas of improvement that internal members cannot detect.

"Apathy is avoided most effectively when quality professionals are equipped to ensure product quality while addressing the bigger issues of process control, process improvement, and process design," notes Miller.

### Product control

A company's earliest quality efforts usually focus on protecting the customer from receiving bad product. This is often achieved with a final inspection process that separates bad product from good. If it's easy to collect and store this failure data from product inspections, companies can track the number of good and bad units and the reasons that product failed inspection. Over a short time, lean organizations find that when product inspections are done at earlier steps in the process, more costly defects are reduced at the end of the process. Like an exercise program that's working, keeping the team engaged is much easier when these types of quantifiable results can be reported early and often; it's part of the antidote to apathy.

### Process control

As quality efforts pay off in reduced defect costs and consistently low defect levels, often the next move is to implement variable statistical process control. Not only are your inspection costs reduced by decreasing the size and frequency of samples inspected, but these new data will also help you evaluate the stability of the manufacturing process. Companies can immediately recognize small process changes before they become big enough

to produce bad product. Real-time statistical alarms help prevent bad product from reaching the customers because the process, not the product, is controlled; this contributes to buy-in and ongoing reengagement to continued process improvement.

"There are ways to reduce the costs and cycle times of Six Sigma, which mitigate some of the resistance and apathy," says Miller. Hertzler's Transactional Six Sigma solution suggests:

- Capture the right data to drive business transformation.
- Connect with other information systems to streamline and reduce data acquisition costs.
- Sustain the gains made during the control phase with real-time data collection-and-control failure notification.
- Multiply ROI from existing business systems by making better use of data.
- Focus attention on improvement goals through innovative defect-improvement charts.
- Uncover hidden sources of variation with automated analysis.

Jones' *USA Today* "Advice from the Top" feature also profiled the "Do's and Don'ts of Six Sigma" which provides other functional methods to avoid apathy, such as:

- At first, Six Sigma will seem like added work. It is, but it pays off. Resist the urge to pull people out of training.
- When you fix things, fix them for the last time.
- Challenge the boss with irrefutable data.
- Don't leap to help customers eliminate waste until you've given Six Sigma at your company time to mature.
- Don't wait to implement Six Sigma. Embrace it completely and holistically.

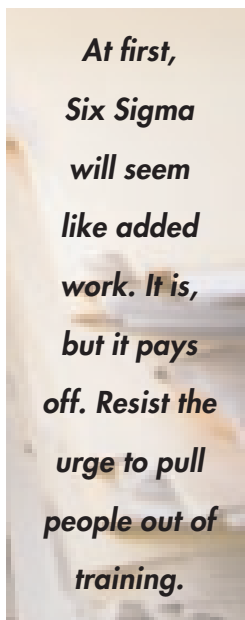
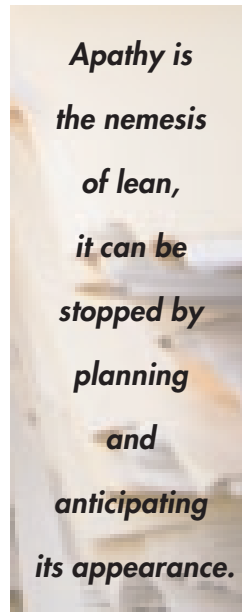
"Six Sigma was often used as a 'Hail Mary' pass," says Textron CEO Campbell.

"Six Sigma isn't enough. Implementing it at Textron was absolutely necessary, but there are other things that must be done to drive continuous improvement. It's bodacious, but we said we're going to become known and recognized as the premier multi-industry company. Not a premier company, but *the* premier company, which means establishing a track record of years and years of performance. Somebody out there has to be the premier company. Why can't we? Once you make that statement, you have the license to walk in and ask, 'What are we doing to create a premier legal department, or finance department, or production line?' If you get enough premiers, pretty soon you'll be known as the premier company."

The literal translation of apathy is "without emotion." In the lean process, this translates as, "Who cares?" This attitude will spell the demise of a lean program and must be stopped by planning and anticipating its appearance. "Workers can be content the way things are," Miller explains. "They may work side by side for years. They take their lunch together. Now, one is moved four bays down. You have to take these things into consideration, but we are seeing hourly employees who want to be trained in Six Sigma. I believe everybody wants to do a better job tomorrow than they did yesterday."

### About the author

Thomas R. Cutler is the president and CEO of Fort Lauderdale, Florida-based TR Cutler Inc., the largest manufacturing marketing firm worldwide ([www.trcutlerinc.com](http://www.trcutlerinc.com)). Cutler is the founder of the Manufacturing Media Consortium of 3,000 journalists and editors writing about trends in manufacturing. Cutler is also the editor of the Manufacturers' Public Relations and Media Guide (TR Cutler Inc., 2001). **QD**



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