

FOREWORD

Rath & Strong has produced a practical guide for CEOs and other senior leaders who face the daunting challenge of making Six Sigma work within their own organizations. This book was written because there is no standard road map that companies and institutions can follow to implement Six Sigma quality initiatives. This unique road map will help you anticipate what to expect—what works and what doesn't—based on the lessons of others who have blazed a trail and gone before.

The editors have assembled information, advice, and a wide variety of case studies illustrating how leaders can use Six Sigma to drive the business, including personal interviews of prominent business leaders from large and small companies. It isn't a handbook filled with statistical tables, but what you will see is the wide variety of challenges faced by business leaders in a broad range of companies and industries.

My company, Quest Diagnostics, made a commitment in 2000 to become a Six Sigma company. I first heard about Six Sigma more than 20 years ago while working at Corning, and subsequently lived through a myriad of "soft" approaches to quality improvement, including QMS and TQM, that failed to live up to their promise. We have invested significant time and resources as part of our commitment over the past few years and have made enormous progress toward our goal. However, the path has not always been easy, and, as with others pursuing Six Sigma perfection, there is more road to travel.

The first lesson I quickly learned was that Six Sigma isn't something that can be delegated. Like the values and culture of a company, the success of a quality initiative is a direct result of senior leadership commitment and involvement. I quickly saw that I needed to become *personally* involved—to take a high profile—and become a Black Belt myself. I cleared my calendar (that is, during the day!), spent four weeks in intensive training, immersing myself in Six Sigma methodology, and then led two defect-reduction projects. Being a Black Belt has helped me become an outspoken and credible advocate and champion for Six Sigma with our employees, customers, and shareholders.

A second lesson for me was that, despite many internal and external skeptics, Six Sigma can work for any organization, and not just for manufacturing companies. Yes, Six Sigma quality had its origins in the manufacturing sector, but it is being applied today to the services arena by companies such as my own and even by government agencies. Because Quest Diagnostics is in

the health care field, we feel that offering the best quality is also a moral imperative. Six Sigma makes tremendous business sense, regardless of the business you are in.

In our company, Six Sigma has enabled a dramatic culture change. Our employees are changing the way they work through customer focus, process definition, rigorous measurement, root-cause validation, and disciplined process monitoring and the use of control charts to ensure improvements are sustained and processes remain in control and aligned with customer needs.

Another lesson learned is that Six Sigma can be used to generate growth and not just to cut costs. While it is an excellent methodology to help drive out costs, Six Sigma also can enhance a company's focus on the customer, and it builds a facts-based culture committed to improving processes every day, which impacts the top line and the bottom line.

For Quest Diagnostics, revenues and earnings are up, client service complaints are down, and we can point to growth in new business as a direct result of Six Sigma. Customers have asked us to collaborate with them on Six Sigma projects to improve quality in mutual processes—and the outcome is heightened customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In short, Six Sigma works!

This book will help make sure Six Sigma works for you, too. This handbook is a valuable resource for leaders considering implementing a Six Sigma program. I wish I had something like it when Quest Diagnostics first embarked on our commitment to Six Sigma quality a few years ago.

*Kenneth W. Freeman
Chairman and CEO, Quest Diagnostics Incorporated
Teterboro, New Jersey*