



## To BB or Not to BB

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OK, so you're not Hamlet, and deciding whether to become a Six Sigma Black Belt is not a matter of life or death. But it is a major career move, and you should carefully consider the pros and cons. With a nod to David Letterman, we have created two "Top Ten" lists that can help you make this tough decision.

### *Not to BB:*

1. The work pace won't slow down. On the contrary, you'll probably be putting in 50+ hours a week and wishing more were available. This is not a way to escape from your hectic job, or to hide out until retirement.
2. You won't strike it rich. Don't expect a big raise to come with the new job. Your organization will likely be struggling with the compensation issue for a while, as it tries to figure out what to do with new BBs who come from various organizational (and salary) levels.
3. You won't become the big kahuna. No one will fan your sweaty forehead or peel grapes for you. Although you'll be leading a team, you will have no direct authority and no minions. You'll have to rely on your influence skills, not your title or staff, to get things done.
4. Everyone will not be glad to see you. If you expect process owners and department managers to welcome you and your new Six Sigma tools with open arms, guess again. You may very well be seen as a threat (at least at first)...particularly in the eyes of those who've had responsibility for the process you are so graciously offering to fix.
5. You have to deal with numbers. No, you don't have to go into the training as a statistics whiz. But numerical analysis is an important part of the job, and not one you can avoid. If this prospect strikes fear in your heart, perhaps you should consider a different move.
6. You won't be able to hide from people. If you're looking for a way to hide in your office or cubicle and crunch numbers, this is not the job for you. While analysis is certainly



required, you'll spend more time away from your desk than at it. And you'll be interacting with people up, down, and across the organization.

7. You will not single-handedly and heroically save the company ten million dollars. Six Sigma projects are team, not individual, efforts. It's not going to be just you. And it typically takes multiple projects over a period of years to attack the root causes of thorny organizational issues. So don't buy the Superman cape just yet.

8. You won't escape annoying co-workers. Typically, at least one of your projects will involve an area in which you have experience...more than likely in the department for which you currently work. Not only will you not escape those people, but you may have them on your project team!

9. The clothes won't get any better. Forget about getting a real black belt; the martial arts metaphor doesn't go that far. If you're wearing Dockers now, you'll be wearing Dockers as a BB.

10. Your problems won't all be miraculously solved. Sorry, but Six Sigma is not a magic bullet. Having problems balancing work and home? Teenagers driving you nuts? Agonizing over the meaning of life? These issues won't go away. On the plus side, however, you'll have less time available to spend worrying about them!

If you're thinking "So can someone tell me why I would want to take this job?" then read on...

***To BB:***

1. You'll never be bored. While the overall process (DMAIC) remains the same, each project involves new people, new topics, and new application of the tools. You'll have to deal with technical, behavioral, and managerial issues – possibly beyond whatever you've encountered (or wanted to encounter) before. You'll be a veritable whirlwind of activity; you won't have time to be bored!

2. You'll make a meaningful contribution. If your organization does this right, Black Belt projects will be directly connected to the business strategy. No selecting paint colors for the washroom in this job – you'll be working on things that make a real difference.



3. You'll be highly visible. Since Black Belt projects are (should be) of strategic importance, high-level managers typically review progress. If your project is really successful, you may get to present it to the Big Boss. If you find this more scary than exciting, or you're intent on flying below the organizational radar, then this may not be the job for you.
  
4. You'll pick up new skills. Black Belts have the opportunity to learn state-of-the-art methods and tools for problem solving and process improvement. You'll learn how to present opportunities and results in the language of top executives. And really, how could you pass up a chance to join that small group of people who are actually comfortable with statistics? Just think of how impressed your mother will be!
  
5. You'll broaden your perspective. The nature of Black Belt projects is such that they tend to cross several departments or functions, and they involve understanding the "voice of the customer." If you've never looked look outside your silo or your company, now's your chance. No matter what your ultimate career goal, this kind of experience couldn't hurt.
  
6. You'll become more influential. To succeed in this job, it's not enough for you to be competent and hardworking; you have to get things done through other people. We can guarantee two things: some of those people won't be quite as enthused as you are about the project, and on the positive side, you'll get better at influencing and managing change...or you'll lose your mind.
  
7. You'll be rewarded. While you shouldn't expect a big raise for taking the job, (and of course you're doing it for the love of your comrades and not the money, right?), most organizations reward their BBs sooner or later with stock options or bonuses. At the very least, you're likely to get promoted to a higher-paying job after the BB tour of duty.
  
8. You'll increase your promotability. With all this new experience and exposure, you're sure to be a lot more promotable. Someone has to be a potential future leader for the organization... why shouldn't it be you?



9. You'll increase your job security. While it seems that no job is secure these days, it's less likely that a company will downsize those a) who are doing work that directly affects the business strategy and b) in whom they just invested thousands of training dollars. Need we say that increasing your job security might not be a bad move?

10. You'll increase your marketability. Black Belts are hot commodities in today's market... particularly those who have completed multiple projects and who are good at both the technical and behavioral aspects of the job. Marketability is the flip side of job security – why not have both?

Our advice? Take an honest look at yourself -- your interests, your strengths, and what motivates you. Re-read the lists above and consider your reaction. Is it "Get me out of this Dilbert joke!" or "Sounds exciting!?" If the latter, then your answer is "To BB." In that case, go for it, and good luck!

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