

“How to Catch! Six Sigma”

By Cyndi Crother

The prevalent method used by many organizations to implement Six Sigma looks something like this: Senior executives attend a conference and decide they want Six Sigma integrated into their organization. An edict is sent down the ranks, and managers/workers start *doing* Six Sigma activities. Lo and behold, a few years later, folks are spending more time justifying their Six Sigma spending, training, and activities than just *being* a Six Sigma organization. This process is absolutely backwards, and more often than not, the tool or methodology is blamed. Or worse, people are blamed for its failure.

These organizations can learn something from a retail fish market in Seattle, Washington. What do a bunch of fishmongers know about Six Sigma? Technically speaking, not much. Philosophically, however, the fishmongers at Seattle’s “World Famous” Pike Place Fish Market have developed keen insights on *focusing on the process* to allow for an extraordinary product and customer service experience to emerge.

Some years ago the Fish Market crew, led by owner John Yokoyama and their motivational coach, sat down to decide who they wanted to be and how they could create a new future for themselves. They decided on a grand plan – to be world famous. Then they decided among themselves *what that would mean*. “To us, being ‘World Famous’ is a way of being,” their website states. “It gets created by each one of us...It’s about taking care of people.... The secret to our secret lies in our commitment to being who we say we are.”

Transforming one's self from ordinary to great is a choice. As described in *Catch! A Fishmonger's Guide to Greatness* (publisher, date), the Seattle fishmongers operate on “the principle that I am responsible for what I experience and how I react to what occurs in my life.” Through their actions, they demonstrate “a sense of responsibility for themselves and for others

The Pike Place Fish Market, located at the historic Pike Place Market in Seattle, Washington, USA, is as much about entertaining the customers as it is about selling them fresh seafood. The fishmongers’ lively practice of flinging fish is part and parcel of their dedication to being “world famous” – which includes “having fun and creating excitement” while they work. In 2001, the Fish Market was named “the most fun place to work” in the United States by CNN. Its management philosophy of giving customers and employees “the best experience they’ve ever had” has made the company culture a model for organizations worldwide.

Pike Place Fish is aligned with BizFutures to share its fish philosophy through coaching and training programs. Presentation topics include “Loving What You Do - Doing What You Love,” “Team Building: From Managing To Coaching,” and “A Game Worth Playing - Creating a Company People Love Working For.” Seminars have been presented to such companies as Nordstrom, Boeing and Amazon.com. The flying fish also are featured in business retreats, workshops, corporate training videos, and books, including *Catch! A Fishmonger's Guide to Greatness*, by Cyndi Crother and the Fish Market crew.

“While they are best known for the energy and excitement they generate at the Market, they are less known for their unprecedented financial results. In the past seventeen years, Pike Place Fish's cost of doing business has dropped nearly twenty-five percent, revenues have quadrupled and profits have increased tenfold.” – from Catch!

within their organization.” When the individuals in an organization choose greatness collectively – as in the Pike Place Fish Market – the organization is transformed.

The fishmongers’ success serves to illustrate that the most effective method for initiating continuous improvement strategies is to first have a dialogue around *what it means to be Six Sigma*. How would your job be different if you went to work tomorrow only to find that your company was now a Six Sigma organization? What changes in your thinking would be necessary for you – and the organization – to be successful?

The most progressive companies begin any type of continuous improvement with this dialogue. Once the meaning is personalized and very clear, people don’t wonder about what to do because it comes quite naturally out of their understanding and thinking. As a result of this happening collectively (thinking better together), the natural outcome is the reduction of variation...hence, on a path to Six Sigma.

Cyndi Crother, Ph.D. is a professor, organizational consultant, and author of *Catch! A Fishmonger’s Guide to Greatness*. Released in 2004, *Catch!* has been translated in seven languages and won the Independent Publisher’s Book of the Year in 2004 in the business/career category. Dr. Crother recently founded Guide to Greatness Consulting and is currently teaching for The National Graduate School’s Master of Science Degree Program in Quality Systems Management.