

## SEPTEMBER, 2008

*This newsletter features topics related to managing change and improving our work environments. If there are topics you would like to see covered or feedback you have about this newsletter, please submit your ideas and feedback to the following link: <http://www.anneoffner.com/contact.htm>*



September marks the official start of my fourth year with Offner and Associates, LLC. My Dad used to tell me that time goes by quicker than we anticipate, and while he was right about that, he neglected to add how much can happen as we watch it fly.

Since August 2004, I've had the opportunity to work with dozens of individual clients as well as just over 20 organizations in the United States, Latin America, and Asia. It has been a privilege to work in this capacity. I've been invited to work as a leadership and career coach, an advisor to Human Resources and Organization Development staff, a trainer for management groups, a facilitator for strategic planning meetings, a college instructor, an editor, and a recruiter.

As I embark on year number four, I am, aside from all the other activities, getting involved with Lean Six Sigma work.

Officially, the definition of Six Sigma is "a statistical concept that measures a process in terms of defects"<sup>ii</sup> and Lean is "an operational strategy aimed at achieving the shortest possible cycle time by eliminating waste and reducing non-value-added work."<sup>iii</sup>



What this means is that Lean and Six Sigma together are methods that we can use to solve problems. Sometimes these problems are everyday issues that have simple solutions such as organizing materials to allow employees to easily find them or minimizing the number of meetings required to make a decision. Other times these are complicated problems that require more sophisticated solutions such as implementing an IT solution to allow inventory to be tracked.

On a recent trip to an organization using Lean Six Sigma, I learned that although they got involved in these methods to help reduce costs and production time, they are finding corollary benefits for their employees. The problems they are solving have helped improve the company's safety record, enhanced ergonomic accommodations for workers, and used

employee ideas to create better ways of getting work accomplished.

Recently, I applied some of the Lean tools in my work with a small organization and found that in a four-hour block of time we were able to identify the major customer and process issues bogging down the employees who are working in the department. After some analysis with the leadership of the department we will be able to pinpoint specific solutions to the problem and use the results to advocate for similar changes in related departments.

Over the next year, I hope to share my learning in this area with you through this newsletter. Suffice it to say that I am finding it to be a flexible tool that can help solve problems, save money, and improve the work environment.



Additionally in the coming year, I will continue to work with leadership and career assessment. I have talked about leadership assessment in other newsletters<sup>iii</sup> and recently taught a course at Washington University focusing on how to use assessments for selecting and developing leaders. While the class was meant to be for students getting a master's degree in Human Resources Management, several MBA students also attended, which led to some rich discussions by those who might be asked to "go through" a selection process

in the near future and those who might be creating these processes.

My main focus in the course was on ensuring that companies understand their objectives prior to creating leadership selection and development efforts. From the students' responses, it appears some of the main points they valued learning from the class were:

- There is no one true definition of what makes a good leader.
- Leaders need to have strong intellectual abilities because they are often called upon to solve problems, use effective analysis when making decisions, and think critically.
- Leaders also need to have a personality that matches the needs of their organizational culture and inspires or motivates others to help them reach important objectives.
- Assessment Centers are a growing trend and offer a method to round-out a selection or development process that using simple assessments or interviews alone can't provide.
- Selection, promotion, or development processes should include multiple types of assessment to really get a view of a candidate's capabilities, personality, and potential.

On this note, I will leave you with a question: How would you compare and contrast your own organization's leadership selection and development efforts to the "best practices" outlined by my students?

**Anne Offner, Ph.D.** is the owner/principle of Offner and Associates, LLC, a change management and leadership development consulting firm. She works with organizations & individuals to maximize performance, effectiveness and satisfaction in the workplace.

**This newsletter is edited by Larry Offner of West Palm Beach, Florida.**

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- <sup>i</sup> Brue, Greg (2002). *Six Sigma for Managers*, WI: McGraw-Hill, ISBN: 0-07-138755-2.
- <sup>ii</sup> Burrus, Rudy (1999-2005). *Process Advancement and Redesign Training*.
- <sup>iii</sup> See Offner and Associates Newsletters, April 2006 and August 2007