

## Introduction



# Why I Believe LESS Is More

When I started working in the area of process improvement 20 years ago, “quality” was a major business buzzword not always backed by a clear definition of its purpose, continuous improvement was looked at as a way of cutting costs (and sometimes, alas, corners), Six Sigma was a practice only manufacturing companies were talking about seriously, and the term “Lean” – as it relates to waste elimination – had not even been coined. In the last 20 years, a lot has changed. And mostly for the better.

Continuous improvement is no longer viewed as being strictly a tool for cost-cutting to boost the bottom line. Yes, it does help companies improve their financial results in that largely internal sense. But it also has proven highly effective in helping them grow the “top line” in intensely competitive global marketplaces.

The collection of principles and practices known today as LSS – Lean Six Sigma – has become much more than a toolset applied only in manufacturing organizations. Service-focused businesses in every sector of the economy, including the public sector, have seen phenomenal results, while manufacturing companies have leveraged the lessons learned on the plant floor to address their transactional processes as well.

The nature of the organizational approach has broadened tremendously – and ambitiously: from essentially a form of localized problem-solving to a powerful resource that can help managers execute strategies at every level of the business.

Over the years I have leveraged my personal Lean Six Sigma experience and knowledge to partner with a wide array of organizations. I’ve helped them launch and expand – both globally and cross-functionally – highly effective process-improvement efforts credited with generating more than

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\$500 million in annual benefits. I've rolled up my own sleeves as necessary to lead countless successful Lean Six Sigma projects in diverse process environments: sales and marketing, manufacturing, research and development, and all types of administrative processes. I've trained and supported hundreds of executives, Master Black Belts, Black Belts, and Green Belts in LSS methods.

While I truly believe in the power and possibilities of Lean Six Sigma, I have seen a lot of opportunity left on the table: longer than required improvement cycle times, low "Belt" certification rates, improvements not linked to business priorities, and overly bureaucratic approaches.

It's part of my nature, both personally and professionally, to continually seek ways to improve processes. LSS is no different: In addition to its powerful potential to improve an organization's critical processes, it's also a process in itself, and consequently should be subject to improvement.

That's the genesis of this book. In contrast to critics who contend LSS is outmoded, even fated to fall prey to the very problems it's designed to address, I'm convinced the "Event-based" approach described in these pages can transform LSS practices – and practitioners – generating more sustainable results faster, and without inflating costs in the bargain.

From my combined experience and observations, I further believe fully achieving the promise of LESS (*Lean Event Six Sigma*) depends on two critical factors:

- ▶ The way process-improvement efforts are positioned and supported within the larger organization.
- ▶ The way improvement projects themselves are executed.

That's how I've organized *LESS Is More*.


Section 1 provides an overview of the current state of LSS and a glimpse at the additional value organizations can realize by employing the next-generation LESS approach. I'll show you the benefits companies have achieved as well as provide an honest assessment of the potential potholes that can be encountered if the basic concepts and methodologies are not carefully deployed.

Section 2 offers a "C-level" organizational view that shows how to position and support an overall LESS deployment to maximize its odds for success: picking the right projects, getting executives fully committed to the

change process, and building on a proper organizational infrastructure for sustaining improvements.

Section 3 explores the progression of a typical Lean Event: not just the focused activity involved in the central Event phase, but also the crucial roles of the Preparation and Transition phases that precede and follow.

Section 4 expands the focus from the short term to the long view, showing how LESS lends itself to building a culture of Process Excellence in which immediate gains not only are sustained, but make possible even greater forms of continuous improvement.

To keep the size of this book manageable, and the discussion at an appropriate but not overwhelming level, I have chosen to augment the contents covered here with that of my company's website – [www.ProficiencySystems.com](http://www.ProficiencySystems.com) – which can serve as an active resource for your future process improvement needs. Whenever you see this symbol , it means additional material is available to you online.

Whether you're an executive-level "customer" of process improvement with accountability for LESS efforts, or a practitioner looking for greater depth and the most recent developments in the field, the combination of this book and its supporting web content will help you extend the value of the time you're about to invest in ways that respond to your specific needs.

Virtually as well as literally, you'll find, less indeed is more.

Jeff Stankiewicz

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