

By Mike Serena, Ed.D., Managing Director, TBM LeanSigma® Institute

Over the past several months, I have had several requests from my clients to recommend a few “quick reads” for general employee lean awareness that highlight not only the importance of fostering quality in the workplace but also establishing everyone’s role in attaining it. Many have read the classic *All I Need to Know about Manufacturing I Learned in Joe’s Garage* by Schenk and Miller. It is a ground-level discussion of lean principles and concepts told in story format that holds the readers’ attention and provides some excellent examples.

Recently, the same authors have published a sequel to their initial effort, *All that Matters about Quality, I Learned in Joe’s Garage*. It has received mixed reviews with comments ranging from, “this sequel focuses more on story and not enough on content” to “very informative and easy to read.” Of course, perceived value is in the eye of the reader and how information is applied; however, I found the book to be as the authors intended, that is, a basic introduction to a topic that allows the reader to first understand the importance of material presented and then how it may be applied at their particular site. I have had several e-mails from folks who have read this book and recommended that I pass it on to all readers of this column.

A significant number of texts discussing the importance of quality and customer service in expediting both lean and cultural transformation are now surfacing. Subir Chowdhury is one author who has established himself as a “leading quality expert” according to the *New York Times*. He has written 12 books to date and many will recall him by two of his most successful, *The Power of Six Sigma* and *Design for Six Sigma*. Do not be misled that Chowdhury is all about sigma in the workplace. He does an excellent job of illustrating not only quality in the workplace but also how it is directly aligned with the application of lean principles and concepts. His latest book, *The Ice Cream Maker* (Doubleday Business, 2005) is a superb introduction to the importance of establishing quality and customer service in the minds of the workforce as an uncompromising foundation to realizing operational excellence and competitiveness in the global marketplace.

As in the books by Schenk and Miller, Chowdhury tells a delightful story of an ice cream company that is quite innovative, and yet the company is having difficulty competing industrywide in both growth and profitability. Peter Delvecchio, the Dairy Cream plant manager, is agonizing over why his sales folks are unable to get the local grocery store (Natural Foods) to stock his ice cream and decides to make a visit to better understand the issues. What follows is some very good insight into the need for the “voice of the customer” as well as how the employees of Natural Foods have embraced the importance of customer service and quality in the work they perform every day. The book has many examples as to how the “hearts and minds” of employees must be won over in order to ensure rapid change and “perceived value” for all. The book makes the point about how peer pressure can be a far more effective method for governing desired behavior than trying to manage from the top down.

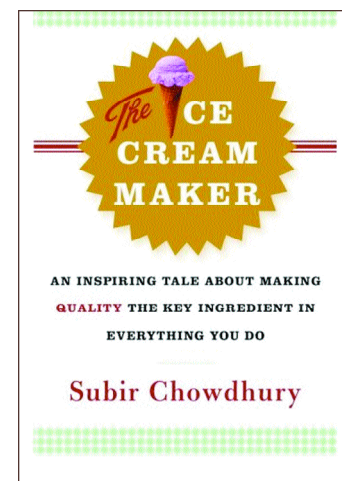
Readers who are both customer- and service-oriented will benefit from reading this text. Chowdhury states that, “if you sell something, you have customers ... and if you have customers, you’re in service.” Of course, it goes without saying that if you plan to stay in business, your most important job should be to “take care” of those customers in ways that will differentiate you from your competitors. There is a great deal of discussion about how organizations must strive to differentiate themselves as well as their products and services. Most specifically, many examples are presented in terms of listening to both internal and external customers, consistently performing to established targets, idea innovation, and exceeding expectations.

The last section of the book discusses how an organization can optimize its efforts in some succinct steps that can be understood by all, no matter what level or job an employee may currently work.

There is much to learn in this easy-to-read short story of a mere 112 pages. Be prepared to make notes, highlight, and “dog ear” more than a few pages, because it will force you to think about how your company and your specific efforts can significantly optimize customer service, quality, and employee satisfaction. ■



Mike Serena



Note: All books that Mike Serena reviews have been recommended by clients and the readers of *Managing Times*. Please send your recommendations for review to Mike at mserena@tbmcg.com.