

Q & A With Gary Reiner of GE, and Liam Durbin of GE Fanuc

Click here to read more about GE Fanuc by visiting www.gefanuc.com.

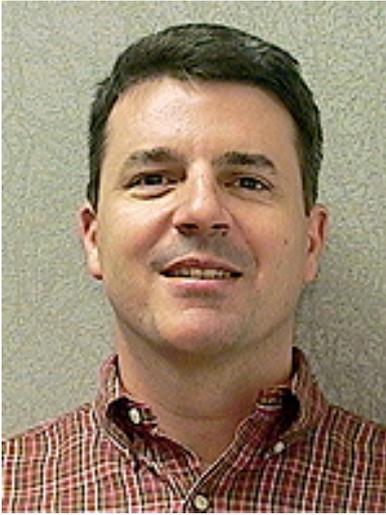
Gary Reiner is Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer of GE, a position he has held since 1996. Reiner joined GE in 1991 as Vice President-Corporate Business Development where he was responsible for evaluating new business ideas and acquisitions, strategic planning, company-wide sourcing and driving best practices throughout the business. In 1996, he led the company's Six Sigma Quality initiative, driving process implementation and program execution across all GE businesses. As part of his current role, Reiner leads the GE information technology, sourcing and Lean Six Sigma efforts company-wide.



Gary Reiner is Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer of GE. As part of his current role, Reiner leads the GE information technology, sourcing and Lean Six Sigma efforts company-wide.

Reiner received a B.A. in economics from Harvard in 1976 and earned an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School in 1980. He joined the Boston Consulting Group in 1980 and was elected a partner in 1986. His work there focused on strategic and process issues for high-technology businesses.

Liam Durbin serves as the CIO for GE Fanuc Intelligent Platforms. GE Fanuc, a unit of GE Enterprise Solutions, delivers proven Production Management Software solutions designed to reduce costs, increase efficiency and enhance profitability. GE Fanuc drives results on the plant floor and in corporate offices, empowering strategic business initiatives while delivering value to the plant, shift after shift, day after day. [Learn more by visiting www.gefanuc.com/productionmanagement](http://www.gefanuc.com/productionmanagement). [1]



Liam Durbin serves as the CIO for GE Fanuc Intelligent Platforms. GE Fanuc drives results on the plant floor and in corporate offices, empowering strategic business initiatives while delivering value to the plant, shift after shift, day after day.

Q: As a company, GE adopted Six Sigma before the methodology really proliferated throughout the global corporate environment. What types of challenges came with being a pioneer, and, in contrast, what kinds of benefits came with paving your own way?

A: Reiner: I learned a lot. I learned that in the area of design for Six Sigma, the tools that were made available to us were particularly valuable for both our engineering and manufacturing. What those tools enabled us to do, is ensure that we designed products that had enough tolerance, relative to our manufacturing capabilities, and relative to how they'd be used, so that our reliability would increase. And it has—and that is the really, really big part of Six Sigma. We found that Six Sigma was also particularly useful on the factory floor for understanding and fixing complex manufacturing processes, where yield was an issue and where the root causes were not clear up front.

Q: Explain the 'GE Way,' and how this approach to Six Sigma was incubated. Why did GE see this as critical to the success of their program?

A: Reiner: We saw an improvement in quality as essential for both our customers and our shareholders. We found that by improving quality, we could improve the reliability of our product line, and in so doing, improve uptime for our customers. It also reduced the amount of rework we were incurring internally, which reduced cost and improved our inventory chain.

Q: What have been the most significant tangible benefits to the long-running Six Sigma program?

A: Reiner: Increased product reliability, and a common vocabulary across all of our employees and various businesses.

Q: What have been the most significant intangible benefits, such as those relating to a general corporate culture or attitude towards quality?

A: Reiner: What we've found was that the problem-solving skills became a reasonably good predictor of leadership. We strongly encouraged that those experts in Six Sigma, following a stint in Six Sigma, become operational leaders in our business.

Q: How about for GE Fanuc?

A: Durbin: Many GE businesses have a special interest in quality. Aviation and Healthcare come to mind. But GE Fanuc also has a vested interest in generating a buzz around our focus on quality. Since GE Fanuc customers buy our products in pursuit of ultimate factory efficiency and product quality, it is incumbent upon us to share an "over the top" passion for quality. We must create a culture of quality that is felt by every employee. And we can't just limit Lean and Six Sigma to the factory. We need it to be pervasive.

When we talk to our customers about Quality and how to use our products they know we are not being hypocritical. Walking our factory floors, they will see Lean and Six Sigma practiced, and Proficy installed, providing data for both. It translates to customer confidence, and that translates to growth.

Q: How did GE have such confidence going into Six Sigma to set such ambitious benchmarks for improvement?

A: Reiner: It was easy—we didn't know what we were getting into. We set a stretch target of "achieving" Six Sigma—we technically still haven't achieved Six Sigma—no company has. We've achieved Six Sigma in certain product lines, for example, our X aircraft engine is Six Sigma, you'll be happy to know, as you fly. But to get every process, at Six Sigma levels, is a lifetime undertaking.

Q: Many companies see a host of significant gains within the first push, then see improvements plateau. After a company goes after the 'low hanging fruit,' how do you maintain momentum? How has GE responded to this potential problem?

A: Reiner: All initiatives like this morph over time. They morph because circumstances change, or because we learn. In our case, we learned that we still needed to improve how responsive we were to specific customer needs. We've adapted our process improvement approach in that direction.

Q: And for GE Fanuc?

A: Durbin: Focus. We have a dedicated Quality Leader staff position, reporting to the CEO, who owns quality for the entire business. The Quality Leader is responsible for product quality, but also for effecting a change in product quality through the use of Lean and Six Sigma in every function.

New employees, including acquisitions, are introduced to Six Sigma very early in the integration process. Every business leader has specific quality goals and objectives each year. We use Lean and Six Sigma tools to achieve them.

Q: What type of value comes with taking a top-down approach, and really getting executives/management onboard as the first step?

A: Reiner: I don't think there's another way to do it. The CEO of the company needs to make it explicitly clear that this is how we will run the company. Our CEO at the time said 'you don't have to do Six Sigma. You don't have to like Six Sigma. You don't have to lead Six Sigma. You just won't be part of the company.'

Q: What type of advice would you offer a company interested in implementing a process improvement program like Six Sigma, responding

Q & A With Gary Reiner of GE, and Liam Durbin of GE Fanuc

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

to the common fear that Six Sigma is just another ‘industry buzzword?’

A: Reiner: I’d say, any process improvement effort you undertake is dependent on two things—business leadership, and training. If you have those two, you’ll succeed; if you don’t, you won’t.

Source URL (retrieved on 10/02/2014 - 1:52pm):

http://www.impomag.com/articles/2007/12/q-gary-reiner-ge-and-liam-durbin-ge-fanuc?qt-digital_editions=0

Links:

[1] http://www.gefanuc.com/as_en/products_solutions/production_management/index.html