When Process Improvement Meets Reality: Stories from the Front Line
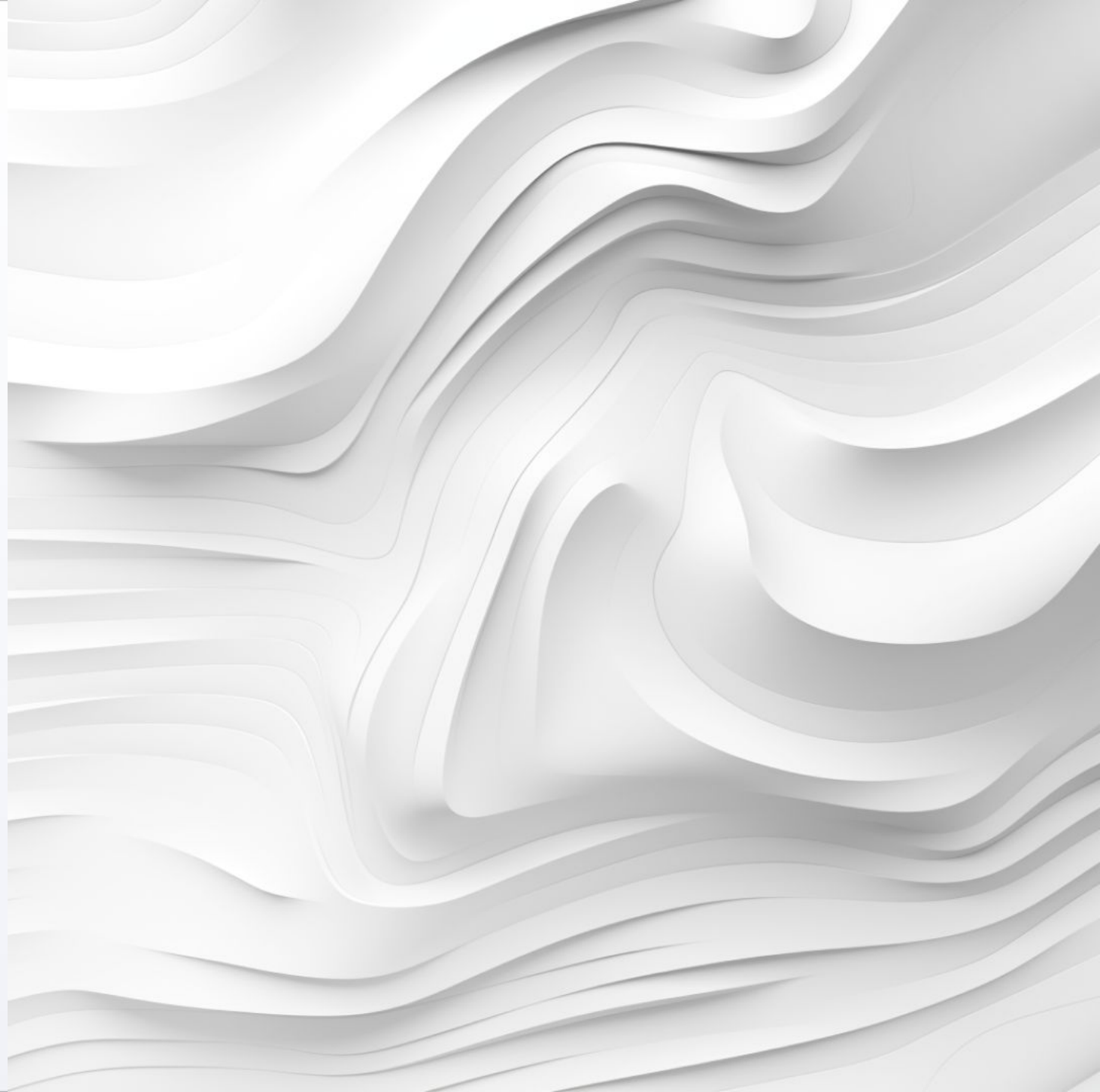
Presented by Eileen Askey and Pat Campbell
"The Gemba Gals"
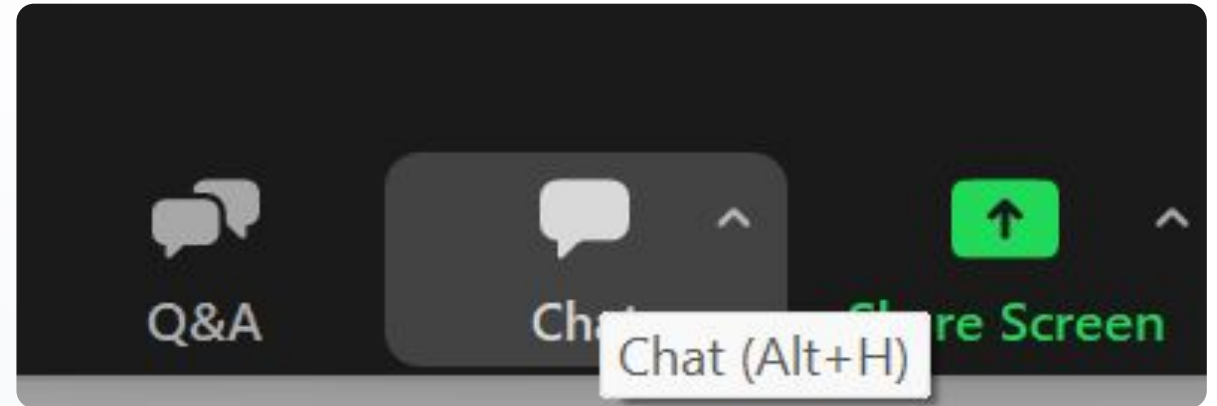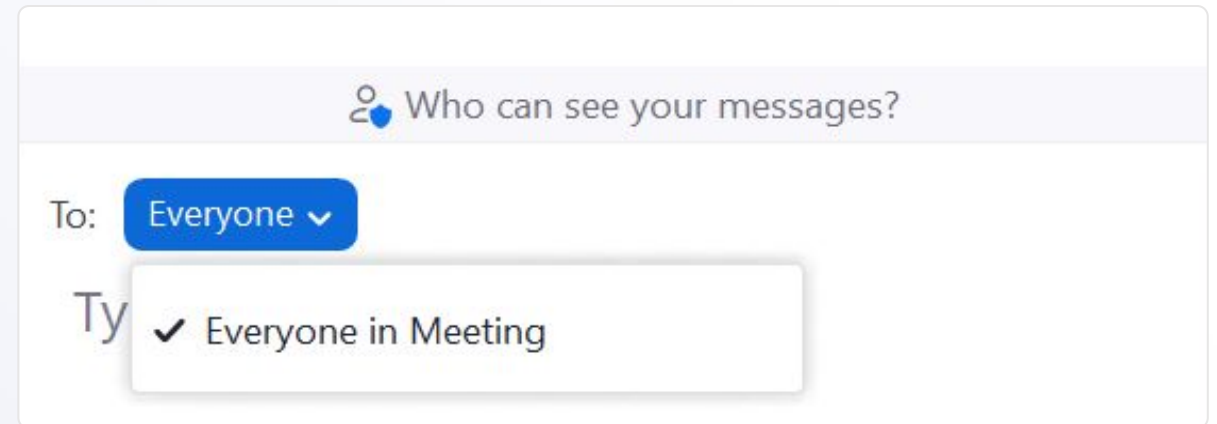
You tell us…

What do you think of when you hear "Lean Six Sigma" for process improvement?

Please use chat and share one or two words to let us know!
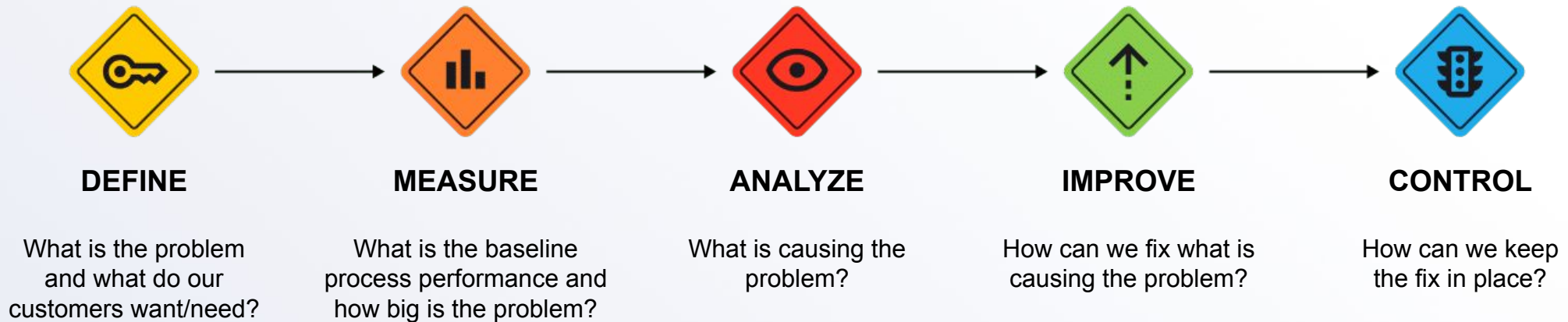
To use "Chat"…

Select "Chat" at the bottom of your Zoom screen. A chat window should open on the right side of your Zoom screen.

Use the "To" drop down menu to select "Everyone in Meeting." To message someone individually, select their name in the drop down menu.

What is Lean Six Sigma?

Lean Six Sigma is a robust process improvement roadmap using DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve and Control) to navigate through identifying the problem, to implementing a solution.

DEFINE → **MEASURE** → **ANALYZE** → **IMPROVE** → **CONTROL**

DEFINE	MEASURE	ANALYZE	IMPROVE	CONTROL
What is the problem and what do our customers want/need?	What is the baseline process performance and how big is the problem?	What is causing the problem?	How can we fix what is causing the problem?	How can we keep the fix in place?

Keep it Simple Statistically using lots of charts and graphs.

Saves Time and Money; Improves Safety and Customer/Employee Satisfaction

Myths and Realities

"It's only for manufacturing."

Lean Six Sigma is used in healthcare, finance, education, software, and more. Its principles apply to any process-driven environment.

"It stifles creativity."

In fact, it frees up time and resources by eliminating waste, allowing teams to innovate more effectively.

It's too expensive to implement.

While training has costs, the ROI is often substantial—many organizations see a 5:1 return within the first year.

"It's a quick fix."

Lean Six Sigma is a long-term commitment to continuous improvement and cultural change.

"It only works in the U.S. or Japan."

It's globally applicable—anywhere people use processes to get work done.

"You have to use many tools to be successful."

Use only the right tools for the problem you are working to solve, right thing at the right time

"It leads to job losses."

The goal is process improvement, not downsizing. Many companies redeploy staff into more value-adding roles.

"Projects are too bulky and take too long."

Combining agility, speed, and critical thinking enables shorter project times with greater output. Agility includes the ability to adjust to changing business needs and pivot projects accordingly.

Why Gemba Gals?

"Gemba" is a Japanese word meaning "the actual place"where value is created. What is the connection?

Gemba Walks are a lean practice:

- Go to where the work is done
- Engage the people doing the work
- Facilitate rapid and effective process improvement

The Gemba Gals

- Engage students to help them improve their processes
- Promote critical thinking and agility vs. weighty bureaucracy and academics

Where is the work done?

- The shop floor in manufacturing
- A hospital ward in healthcare
- User workflow in e-commerce
- The call center, retail floor or logistics hub in the service Industries

Scenario: The Coffee Chaos

What do you see?
What would you do to fix it?

This is the break room setup at a busy company. Employees routinely waste time making coffee, supplies get misused, and no one wants coffee duty. How could Lean Six Sigma/DMAIC help fix this process?

Using a DMAIC mindset, can you identify at least 2 opportunities for improvement that could reduce time waste and improve coffee duty participation? Chat in your thoughts!
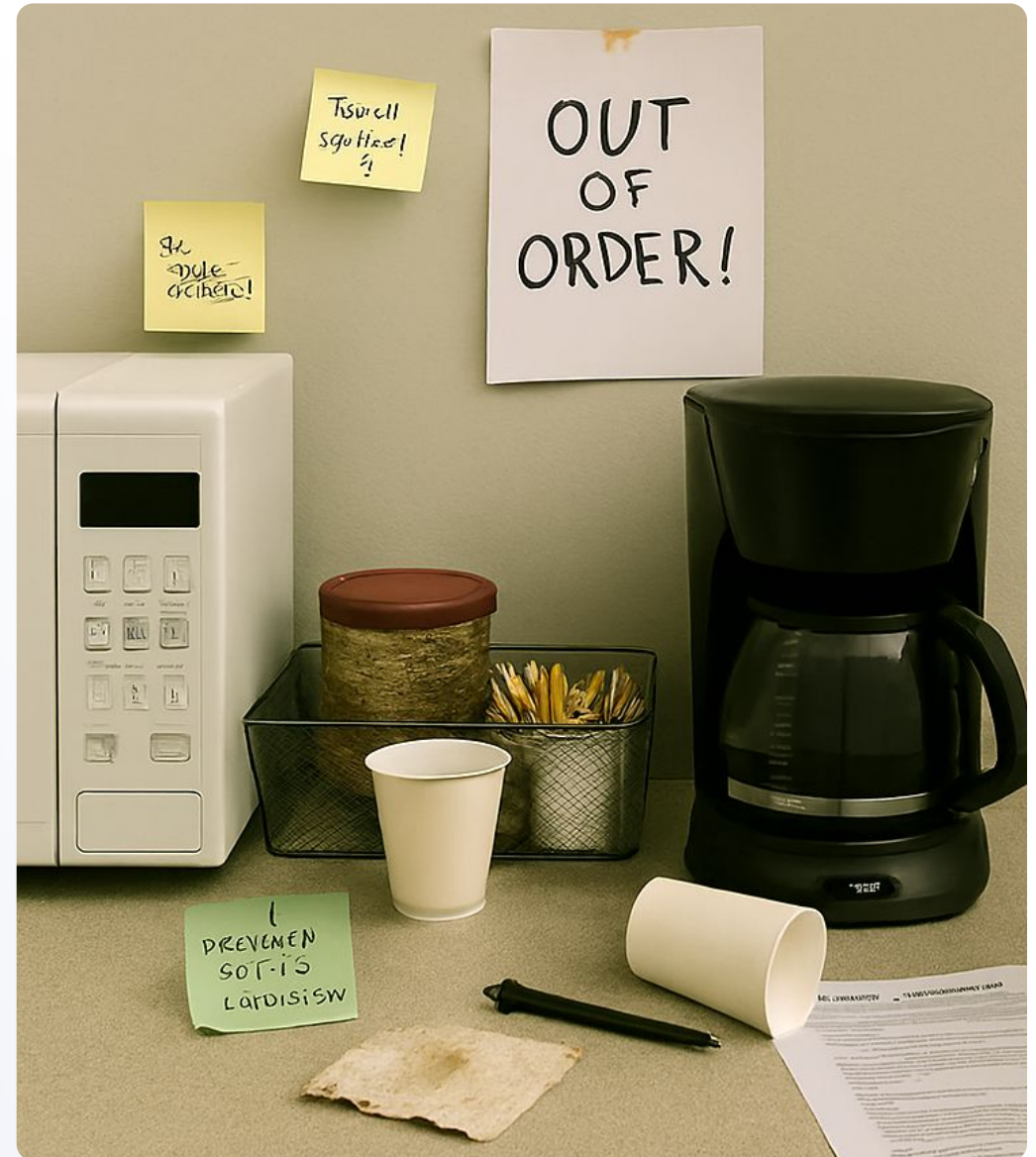
Solution: The Coffee Chaos

Let's see how many of your responses were implemented!

Using 5S*, process documentation, and simplified communication:

- 📋 Visual controls added: Clear signage for cleanliness expectations and handwashing protocols
- ✅ Inventory organized: Coffee pods/bags upright, containers consolidated, filters boxed
- 🧼 Cleanliness reinforced: No loose trash, paper towels, or stained surfaces
- 📁 Stations defined: Dedicated areas for coffee prep, waste disposal, and supply storage
- 🔄 Feedback loops minimized: No sticky notes needed—systems in place for restocking and cleaning
- 🏷️ Labeling introduced: Signs like "COFFEE STATION" and "NOTICE" reinforce accountability
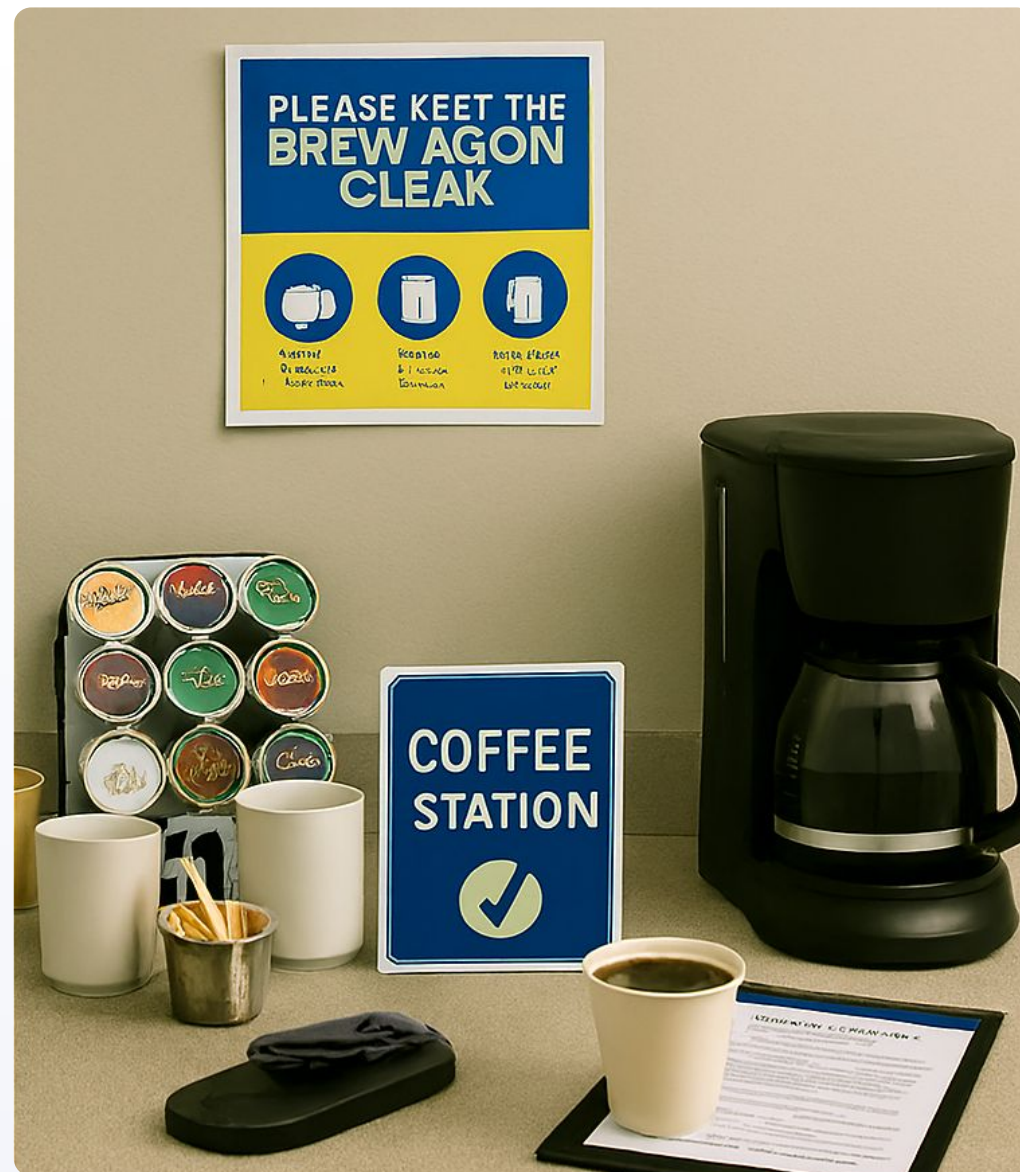
*5S (housekeeping on steroids!) = Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, and Sustain

RIT | Certified

Real life project examples from our training

Project	Business Sector	Results
Reduce physical defects in parts moving from one department to another in a clean environment	Manufacturing	Defects reduced 80%
Streamline and standardize the process of creating Bills of Material for the engineering department	Business Administration	PCE (process cycle efficiency) increased 24% from original process (37% to 61%) • Decreased NVA to 0 • Decreased BVA by > 4X • Increased CVA by > 1.5X
Standardize and speed up the process for onboarding new vendors for a call center	Business Outsourcing	Reductions in process steps resulted in $54k savings
Improve process for creating and updating the knowledge base for financial services reps	Financial Services	SOP and new repository created, implementation plan developed
Improve client questionnaire used by HR Service Reps	HR Services	Time to complete reduced by 50% while maintaining all relevant information

Any other examples you want to share?

Real life project issues

Pivoting is a reality!	Business Sector
A green belt who lost his funding for his solution and had to go back to measure to identify other areas of opportunity; he was able to use a simpler solution that didn't require funding (programming changes)	Manufacturer of Health and Safety Products
A green belt that had business priorities change and he had to scale back his original project, however was still able to deliver improvements to his process within the timeline of the course	Manufacturer of Health and Safety Products
A green belt had an unexpected medical leave during her project that impeded her ability to complete the project on time. Upon her return we were able to work with her to phase her project into manageable chunks so she could bring improvements incrementally	Financial Services
A green belt started on a project to improve defects in a printing operation. He learned the measurement system was completely inadequate and his project shifted to improving the measurement system process and equipment	Printing Operations

Want to learn more about our classes?

RIT Certified offers LSS courses that typically are held weeknights, remotely.

Belt Level	Prerequisites/Requirements	Course Logistics	Course Info/Sign-up
Yellow Belt	No Prerequisites	● Meets for 6 weeks, 1 night a week ● Will complete one small project applicable to a work problem	https://certified.rit.edu/course/lean-six-sigma-yellow-belt
Green Belt	Yellow Belt certification	● Meets for 12 weeks, 1 night a week ● Will complete a full DMAIC project applicable to a work problem	https://certified.rit.edu/course/lean-six-sigma-green-belt
Black Belt	Yellow and Green Belt certification	● Meets for 24 weeks (2 semesters), 1 night a week ● Will complete a full complex DMAIC project as well as an assigned simulation	https://certified.rit.edu/course/lean-six-sigma-black-belt

Contacts

- Questions about the course?
Contact the instructors:

  Eileen Askey - exacert@rit.edu

  Pat Campbell - pccc@rit.edu

  Follow us on "The Gemba Gals" page on LinkedIn!

  https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13169451/

- Questions about our RIT Certified courses?
Contact RIT Certified Career Guidance Team:

  certified@rit.edu

https://certified.rit.edu