



News Release

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Green Belt class aims to improve communication

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ROCK ISLAND, Ill. – Seeking to improve the process by which hearing-impaired employees request interpreters, ASC has launched a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt project.

Two training sessions set the stage for the project. They were held on June 15-19 and July 13-17 in the Army Sustainment Command Headquarters' Command Assessment and Continuous Improvement Conference Center.

The Army has offered Green Belt Training for individuals seeking to learn and apply the Lean Six Sigma (LSS) methodology to drive local improvements within their facility, department, or organization.

For the first time, this type of training is more accessible for the deaf and hard-of-hearing at Rock Island Arsenal. During the class, hearing-impaired students benefitted from having the same full-time interpreters throughout the course while working on a real-life process that directly affected them.

In 2006, the Army selected Lean Six Sigma as the process improvement methodology to support Army Business Transformation.

A Green Belt is someone who wants to demonstrate knowledge of Lean Six Sigma tools and processes and will apply the LSS methodology in their workplace.

According to an LSS presentation, the most recent Green Belt Training class served two purposes: to certify its members as LSS Green Belts and to work on a project that will improve the effectiveness of the interpreter service process.

According to both Richard Jayne, chief of Lean Six Sigma, and Hannah Bond, a contractor with Accenture and one of the class instructors, Maj. Gen. Robert M. Radin, commanding general, U.S. Army Sustainment Command, sought a class geared primarily towards deaf and hard-of-hearing personnel, but that would still allow others to attend as well. He spoke of his concern that the hearing-impaired employees' needs were not being met, and directed a Green Belt training class whose project would focus on improving the process.

Lean Six Sigma is an improvement method that uses data to identify and eliminate process problems. It is an improvement engine that establishes a new set of roles and procedures inside an organization while working to continuously generate results.

Some of the benefits of achieving project goals will be to increase the engagement of hearing-impaired employees in the work environment. This benefits their organizations through their good ideas and more effective work, promoting a better understanding of deaf culture, and facilitating better relationships between process stakeholders.

One measurable goal is to have the scheduled interpreter service match the requirements 99 percent of the time. Instead of performing a budget simulation - a classroom setting, simulated business process in which students learn and process improvement methods - the LSS methodology and tools were applied to a real project geared towards improving the effectiveness of interpreter services.

Jayne was responsible for ensuring class success. His role in the project was to design the class.

He first attained Department of the Army approval, made sure the class had the necessary funds to order books, and had all the accommodations needed for students such as computers and qualified interpreters.

Jayne said one of his main goals was making sure students were able to engage in full communication during the class.

“From the government’s perspective, this class is an opportunity to make sure everyone has the opportunity to learn about continuous improvement methods and learn new tools that can improve their workplace, use fact-based decisions to analyze a problem, learn how to come up with solutions and work in teams,” Jayne said.

“With this class we are trying to be proactive and have better and more effective communication methods with the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. We have computers so that they can type in any questions or comments that they might have, and we are making sure they have everything necessary to ensure everyone is successful in their training,” he said.

Brian Byer, a supply system analyst for TACOM Life Cycle Management Command, who has worked at the Arsenal for more than 20 years, expressed via an interpreter his expectations of the course.

“I am learning about Lean Six Sigma. Hopefully I can use the process and apply it to my everyday work. I want to help the deaf community at large by helping out to resolve the problems and issues we are having,” he said.

“There have been good solutions offered; I am looking forward to all of this. Along with the training I am excited to see how this will impact both the deaf and hard of hearing and the people who are not deaf or hard of hearing. This will be a benefit for all of us since we do understand how one accommodation does not fit all,” Byer said.

The class was taught by two master Black Belts, Bond and Gene Bukowski. The Certified Six Sigma Black Belt is a professional who can explain Six Sigma philosophies and principles, including supporting systems and tools.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing students also had two American Sign Language interpreters continuously assisting them, and were provided additional interpreters when class activities required them.

Some of the problems discussed the first week of class were interpreters not showing up to the correct place at the assigned time; interpreters not having the language certification or the wrong qualifications for the needed service; interpreters not being familiar with technical terminology and not familiar with logistics issues; and the interpreter service request process taking too long.

Tom Lawrence, a supervisor from TACOM Life Cycle Management Command, said he believed it was important to take this course because he has two employees who are hard of hearing. Likewise, Arthur Peals from Rock Island Garrison's Equal Employment Opportunity Office said he took the course because he wants to make sure reasonable accommodations are made for people with disabilities at Rock Island Arsenal.

Bond recalled how this class emerged.

"General Radin has occasional meetings with the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, and he was concerned that so many of them were expressing frustration with the interpreter service process. He suggested that we provide this class to make it accessible to the community to give them skills to take back to their organization and improve processes. They could all work together as a team to solve this problem," she said.

A meeting held earlier this year with members of the community and supervisors discussed the project charter. Bond also spent one day with interpreters to prepare them by sharing the key concepts and terminology.

"I just think this will be an exciting course to teach. Being able to work on a real project and apply real application of the tools will be a great experience for everybody," Bond said during the course. "Hearing members of the class who have never experienced working with deaf or hard-of-hearing employees will teach them the culture of working together to make their workplace more efficient."

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