

# Quality Progress

Advancing Performance Excellence

www.asq.org

OCTOBER 1999

## Cowboy Quality

**Mikel Harry's Riding Tall  
as Six Sigma  
Makes its Mark**



American Society for Quality



**National Quality Month:  
Firms Fight Complacency**



## Six Sigma Saga

**S**o what's all the fuss about Six Sigma?

That's a question I had been trying to answer since I arrived at *Quality Progress* late last year. Like a lot of other people, I had been hearing some contradictory and confusing things.

First, I was told that Six Sigma was the latest concept in quality thinking. But then I learned that it actually got started at Motorola more than a decade ago. Someone said Six Sigma referred to the width of a bell curve measured out that many standard deviations. But then I read that this approach also relied on a shift over time of 1.5 sigma.

Another thing I heard was that Six Sigma was all the rage on Wall Street and at blue-chip companies. But somehow this didn't square with the reports I was getting about the Six Sigma Academy—that it was run by a couple of hard riding cowboys whose real passion was rodeo.

It soon became apparent that the only way to get some answers was to meet with Mikel J. Harry face to face. As he explains it, Mike is not the father of Six Sigma, but rather its godfather. "I put the math to it and dressed it up for school," he says.

In July I traveled to Scottsdale, AZ, where Mike is based, to spend some time learning about the theory and practice of Six Sigma. I came away with a notebook full of quotes and comments about Six Sigma, wild cows and the challenges that face the quality profession. As you'll read in the article that resulted (see "Cowboy Quality," p. 27), Mike isn't afraid to speak his mind.

October is National Quality Month, and I think it's appropriate that we feature Six Sigma in this issue. But I want to point out another article that focuses on how quality is being practiced today (see "Complacency—the Enemy of Quality," p. 37). It was written by Mark Hagen, *QP's* assistant editor, and describes how three companies are actively pursuing quality initiatives during the current economic boom.

Historically quality has had its greatest following at times of financial strife, being seen as a way "out of the crisis," as W. Edwards Deming wrote. In fast growing markets and at high flying companies, quality can be easily overlooked, and so it's gratifying to see how Champion Mortgage, Manpower and

Newton Vineyard are applying quality tools—not out of desperation but as part of a well considered plan to maintain their leadership positions.



*miles maguire*

MILES MAGUIRE  
Editor

**Publisher**

WILLIAM A. TONY

**Editor**

MILES MAGUIRE

**Associate Editor**

SUSAN E. DANIELS

**Assistant Editor**

MARK R. HAGEN

**Manuscript Coordinator**

TANIA KUROPAS

**Editorial Assistant**

KRISTEN JOHNSON

**Contributing Editors**

JIM CLAUSON (CYBERQUALITY)

RON KENETT, SPENCER GRAVES (WORLD VIEW)

GREG HUTCHINS (CAREER CORNER)

ROSE KAUFMAN (COPY EDITOR)

JULIA MORRISSEY (COPY EDITOR)

**Production**

CATHY SCHNACKENBERG

GERRY HAGEN

**Art Director**

MARY UTTECH

**Digital Production Specialists**

MICHAEL ANDES

MICHAEL BORTZ

**Advertising Sales Manager**

PHILIP C. EDMUNDS

**Senior Sales Representative**

JOAN SCHUELKE

**Sales Representatives**

KATHLEEN ARNOLD

PATRICIA E. SERKETICH

JEAN M. WENZEL

**Circulation Administrator**

JILL M. JOSSART

**Marketing Coordinator**

THOMAS STEFANIAK

**Editorial and Advertising Offices**

414-272-8575 fax 414-272-1734

**ASQ ADMINISTRATION**

PAUL E. BORAWSKI

Executive Director

BRIAN J. LEHOULLIER

Director, Programs and Operations

CHRISTOPHER D. BAUMAN

Director, Finance

RICHARD J. SANDRETTI

Director, Market Research and Public Relations

SHEILA T. ZELENSKI

Director, Membership Services

ROBERT KRAWISZ

Director, New Product Development

To promote discussion of issues in the field of quality and ensure coverage of all responsible points of view, *Quality Progress* publishes articles representing conflicting and minority views. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily of ASQ or *Quality Progress*. Use of the ASQ logo in advertisements does not necessarily constitute endorsement of that particular product or service by ASQ.



# Cowboy Quality

*Mikel Harry's riding tall in the saddle as Six Sigma makes its mark*

by

**Miles Maguire, editor**

**C**OWBOYUP. It's all one word the way they say it in the sunburnt, saguaro studded ranchlands that spread across the scrub desert of southern Arizona. It's just one word, but it packs a multiplicity of meanings, and it's something every fearful cowboy needs to hear when his pulse is pounding and his mouth is dry and his legs are quite literally quaking in his boots.

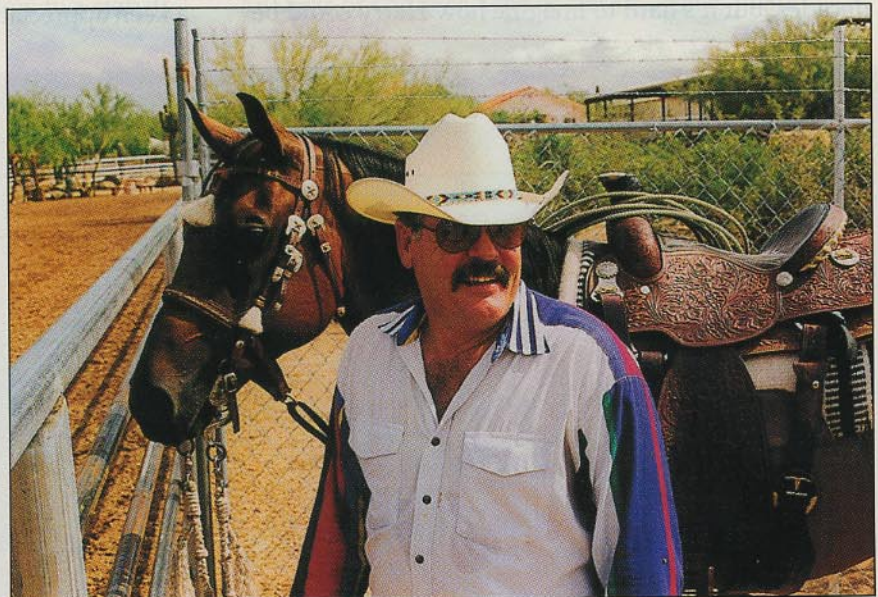
Cowboyup means it's time to get up in the saddle, and it means it's time to reach down inside your heart. Cowboyup means it's time to put away your fears and remember you've got a job to do—and that someone's

paying to see you do it. It also means, cowboy, that this might be your lucky day.

Mikel J. Harry thinks it's time for the quality profession to cowboyup.



As the head of the Six Sigma Academy in Scottsdale, AZ, Harry is becoming what Walter A. Shewhart was in the 1930s and W.



*Mikel Harry*



Edwards Deming was in the 1980s—a quality leader whose insights and ideas are profoundly reshaping the way America does business. At a time when many corporate executives have come to question the value of investing in quality, Harry has won high level converts to his Six Sigma Breakthrough Strategy, an extensive—and expensive—system for turning quality improvements into bottom-line gains. And he has gone further, developing a comprehensive new theory of quality that could revolutionize thinking about the subject and expand its role in business and in society as a whole (refer to sidebar p. 33).

### The story of Six Sigma

Over the last five years Harry has attracted a blue-chip circle of clients and a following among Wall Street analysts. Even among his competitors, he is acknowledged as the leading authority on Six Sigma theory and practice. But the story of his role in developing key aspects of Six Sigma is little known. He did not invent the concept, but the way that it is currently practiced bears the unmistakable marks of Harry's personality and personal history.

At 47 years of age, Harry has lived a packed life that has taken him from a small town in Indiana to a sprawling Arizona ranch. Along the way he served as a Marine Corps officer, worked as a vice president of a major global corporation and acquired a doctorate from Arizona State University. He also learned from a wide variety of mentors, including former Motorola Chairman Robert W. Galvin and a full-time cowboy named Joe Haight.

Six Sigma relies on tried-and-true statistical tools that have been used by quality practitioners for decades, but it's hard to imagine how Harry could be

more different from the quality gurus who came before him. From the tip of his 10-gallon hat to the toes of his pointy boots, Harry looks like he would be more comfortable riding the range than making slide presentations to senior vice presidents. He wears a droopy mustache and has piercing blue eyes set off by a sun- and wind-reddened complexion. As he smokes his way through a pack of Marlboros, it's not hard to imagine him galloping out of one of the cigarette maker's billboards.

When he walks he does so with the rolling gait of someone who's spent long hours in the saddle and with the slightly hunched shoulders of someone who's taken his share of tumbles from the back of a horse. When Harry talks his words come out in the deep drawl of a "dumb ol' Arizona cowpoke" (though he sometimes switches back to a flat Midwestern accent when guiding a listener through the intricacies of a statistical analysis).

### CEOs and cattle chutes

While his predecessors used kitchen bowls and colored beads to make their points about quality, Harry makes his by telling tales of roping wild steers and by showing CEOs how to work a cattle chute. It's almost as if he is preaching a new form of the discipline, what might be called cowboy quality.

It's a frontier version of quality, and it seems well suited for the current economic climate, in which global trade has eroded traditional borders and surging stock valuations have created a gold rush mentality among investors and corporate executives. Those who succeed in wielding this brand of quality have much in common with those who won the West: a keen appreciation for leadership and an understand-

ing of the i  
Sierra-size  
their own.

Part of t  
strangers,  
ly manner.  
skill as a c  
strates wit  
hands as v  
wagon tra  
quality jou

Like the  
your-eye d  
others find  
there's one  
cash. Let's  
quality is r  
this year's  
quality ma  
years to re  
are not wil

Harry ta  
gruff at tin  
we're not  
customers  
many time

While h  
returned p  
support, h  
dle or han  
people wh  
know is a

Defining Six S

Six Sign

