B2E helps Central Hudson meet new challenges, needs

The utility industry is in the midst of a major shift that requires innovative solutions to meet customers’ evolving needs. The transformation is largely driven by advances in technology, changing expectations, New York’s Reforming the Energy Vision and other state and federal regulations.

Central Hudson’s Bridge to Excellence initiative is helping to inspire employees to meet these challenges and find creative ways to streamline processes, eliminate waste and reduce expenses. B2E touches all areas of Central Hudson and is becoming an integral part of the Company’s culture. Every employee can benefit from B2E by eliminating unnecessary processes, minimizing laborious tasks and enhancing the work environment.

“B2E is a road map to utilize the tools and knowledge of Lean Six Sigma and apply it to our everyday work,” said Director of Operational Excellence Jeff Cito. “B2E is here to serve anyone looking to leverage its tools to improve their work. We already use these tools every day, we just need to capture and concentrate this innovation for the betterment of all employees and our customers.”

The foundation of B2E is built on the pillars of Lean Six Sigma, which is a technique to maximize production efficiency and maintain control over each step in the managerial process.

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It relies on a collaborative team effort to improve performance by systematically removing waste. Central Hudson’s program uses many sources for guidance, such as a book titled, “The Lean Six Sigma Pocket Toolbook.”

Employees follow a methodology, known as Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control, or DMAIC. This leads a B2E team from defining the problem through implementing solutions linked to underlying causes, and establishing best practices to ensure the solutions remain in place.

“The Lean Six Sigma analytical perspective to problem solving will help to transform the way we conduct our solution-oriented process,” said Buyer John Lewis, who earned his Yellow Belt on May 14. “Analyzing situations from multiple viewpoints stimulates the need to consider both conventional and unconventional solutions.”

“Customer satisfaction is one of our core principles through a semi-annual White Belt training. Those who feel a connection to the process have the option to earn a Yellow Belt or Green Belt. Yellow Belt training is a three-day course where participants analyze a problem to identify the root causes and potential solutions. Green Belt training takes place throughout a 10-session semester where participants are assigned a project that they must solve using tools and statistical analysis.

There are currently 970 White Belts, 119 Yellow Belts and 54 Green Belts at Central Hudson. Most recently, 17 employees earned their Yellow Belts on May 14. The group addressed four projects: the gas transmission work order process; internal inquiries into the Call Center; sub-station operating diagrams and timely communication with System Operations; and high-low station operating diagrams and timely communication with System Operations.

“We are working on refining the three- and six-month appraisal process through research and development funding. The goal is to make the procedure electronic through the On-base system to improve tracking and reduce waste. This solution is economical and sensible.”

Paul Casado, Assistant System Operator

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To real-world applications,” Cito said. “These are our future Green Belts, subject matter experts and leaders.”

Lewis said he earned his Yellow Belt to equip himself with the skills and knowledge to analyze and improve work processes. He said Lean Six Sigma will help the Supply Chain conduct operational forecasting in a more effective manner and respond to changing demands.

“As a member of the utility industry, we continuously transform ourselves to meet the increased demand for services,” he said.

Fellow Yellow Belt Assistant System Operator Paul Casado said he was interested in Lean Six Sigma before coming to Central Hudson, so he jumped at the first chance to delve into the B2E initiative. He wants to learn the basic framework around building successful projects, whether it involves implementing new processes or improving an existing process.

“I have benefitted from having a new resource in my tool belt that I will always have at my disposal. I welcome the opportunity to showcase what I’ve learned,” Casado said. “I believe that B2E is unique here and will continue to be a driver of excellence for Central Hudson. It gives us a voice and an opportunity to have an impact, however big or small.”

Seven employees have nearly completed their Green Belt training and have been working on their assigned projects. The Company will be visiting Dutchess Community College to deliver White Belt training for the Poughkeepsie High School students enrolled in the newly formed E-TECH on July 23. The Company’s summer interns will earn their White Belts on July 21.

Cito acknowledges the challenges of committing time and energy to B2E, but he believes it can help move the industry forward.

This monthly column features the experiences and perspectives of fellow employees taking part in process improvement.