



There was intense excitement, passion and a sense of urgency in the air as top leaders of a leading Pharma company got seated in their chairs. On this pleasant autumn afternoon, they had travelled from all over the country to be part of one meeting. One meeting to focussed on learning a new language. A language of change, language of improvement and language of growth. For this meeting, today, most of them had started their journey this morning. However, their journey towards this change had started a few years ago sitting at their own individual offices, thinking about a common theme. As leaders, each one of them were responsible for not only making their business successful but more importantly sustaining the livelihood of thousands of employees under them and ensuring effective healthcare reached their end customers. Each day as they visited their shop floor, they were aware that a single error in the manufacturing line could prove fatal to the lives of those dependant on the lifesaving drug their company manufactured. The responsibility on their shoulders was big and therefore the commitment towards change had to be bigger.

The meeting started with a monologue of why they were here. It was important for someone to set the context right. They were not here to complain about each other, or to blame the system or the government. They were here to develop a common language for change that was about to sweep their entire organization. The meeting facilitator threw some statistics on how other companies, in other fields, had improved using a similar language. He then invited the leaders to define their own projects for change. What was the Core Process they wanted to improve? What was the key strength, weakness, opportunity or threat related to that process? What was the initiative that each one of them wanted to drive in their own process? Which initiative would get them the maximum ROI? How did each initiative align to the business priorities of their organization? Each following question was heavier than the question before it. Most of the leaders had not thought about change from this perspective.

The room grew silent. Each leader was busy working on their individual plan. The sea was calm. Calm before the big storm that was just off the horizon. Slowly the waves could be felt lapping the shores. Some leaders approached the facilitator; what if we did this? What if we improved the process, reduced the defects, and increased the knowledge sharing? What if there were 10, just 10, processes which were absolutely defect free? They could easily achieve a saving of 60 crores in a year. Even though all of them were senior leaders, they could barely control their excitement about the turf they were about to enter. This meant new savings, new products, bigger customers and happier employees.



A quick tea break later, tough questions lead to serious conversations on how leaders ought to spend their time effectively. How could an important leader spend time on strategy when there were 100 operational issues on the shop floor? How could a leader desert his team amidst the fire? What would the team think? How would they proceed without the leader? More silence in the group as the realization sank in that a Leader can only lead change, if he/she is focused on strategic initiatives. If leaders themselves got caught up in operational activities like signing cheques and handling daily customer complaints, who would focus on strategy definition? Who could prepare the organization for the next big wave?

Having faced some difficult question themselves, the leaders went back into understanding key questions that they need to ask their teams on how they are planning to grow. When each one of their teams picked up their strategic initiative, how should they understand the voice of their end customers? How should they identify whether the problem they were trying to address was a problem related to mean or a problem related to variation? What was the ROI expected from each of the projects that they were planning to work? Which customers should they work with? What could be the negative impact on the initiative that they were starting?

So many questions that came out of one meeting. They had all come together to learn the language of change. But it seemed like all they had learnt was how to ask the right questions. One might disagree that if we keep asking questions, when do we work on finding the answer! At LASSIB Society we believe that the biggest art that a Leader needs to possess is the art of asking the right questions. Unlike the common belief, as leaders we don't need to provide the answers. We need to ask the right questions and enable the teams to discover the right answers. Once the team discovers the right answers themselves, there is nothing that can stop them from achieving their collective dreams.



About the Author: The author, Shilpa Roy Kota, is the Secretary for LASSIB Society, a not for profit organization focussed on building Organization Excellence. LASSIB Society through its initiative Lean Six Sigma International Board has helped transform the mind set of hundreds of leaders across the globe in building organizations that deliver excellence through efficient processes and motivated employees. The author, also an aspiring writer, was fortunate to be an observer in one of the Leadership Development sessions, from where the above story has been inspired. This story is a true story and names of the organization and participants have been avoided in the interest of the organization.

For more details on Lean Six Sigma visit <https://lassibsociety.org>

For more blogs from the author visit www.shilparoykota.com

About Lean Six Sigma International Board:

Lean Six Sigma International Board is an initiative of LASSIB Society with a vision to create and maintain the world's most useful resource center and certification programs on ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE, available for the users at the lowest cost, using the principles of Gandhian Engineering Know more at <https://leansixsigma.lassibsociety.org>

