

LEAN LEADER

“Dwell in possibility.”

An interview with Racquel Graham

Systems Improvement Consultant and Lean Six Sigma Black Belt at LeanOhio

Racquel Graham has a wealth of experience in the public sector in two states, developing quality and performance improvement initiatives, leadership development programs, and providing organizational consulting. She is a master trainer and facilitator, leading strategic planning and quality improvement processes, designing and presenting training programs, and managing complex projects. Racquel joined the LeanOhio team in 2012 and led efforts to build and support the Lean Local program and is also the lead instructor for LeanOhio Boot Camp. She plans to retire in November 2018 after more than 25 years of service in the public sector.



What sparked your initial interest in continuous improvement?

I was asked to rescue a sputtering Customer Service project, and as I researched, I found this body of work that was being promoted to small business and being taught at the community colleges. It made sense to me that Customer Service wasn't simply about smiling and talking nice to people, but had to be about solving the customers' problems. I liked the systems approach that was being promoted in continuous quality improvement (CQI), and especially the idea of empowering employees to solve problems.

You have successfully implemented Lean Six Sigma in multiple organizations. What has been the most important lesson?

There are many! First Lean/Six Sigma is a multi-layered learning process that happens over time. So we have to be continuous learners and allow ourselves to “get smarter as we go.” Secondly, if we help people to identify and define their problems, and provide a simple, positive method for solving those problems, they become engaged in the process. Use “common language” – have people talk about the issue and start developing a SIPOC without saying, “Let's do a SIPOC.” Lastly, positive persistence is essential.

What project/event/initiative are you most proud to have been a part of at LeanOhio?

Hmm, this is a difficult question. Perhaps the refinement of LeanOhio Boot Camp and the addition of the A3 tool for reporting results which has resulted in more people applying what they have learned and generating more results! Another is the Lean Local initiative which spread LeanOhio Boot Camp around the state, training more than 2000 local government officials and employees and resulting in many,

many, documented improvements. And lastly, the Grants Management project that resulted in eleven state agencies defining a common grants management process to develop a new system for managing grants.

What is one of the challenges you've encountered during your Lean journey, and how did you address it?

After a very successful Kaizen event, the Team Lead got a new job and then a few months later, the Team Champion (Director) left that position. It was challenging trying to follow-up and be sure of who was driving the implementation. I was persistent (but not annoying ☺), understanding that it would take more time. I reminded them about why we had done the Kaizen and the potential improvements that would be realized with full implementation. We modified the implementation schedule and I followed up in a year. They had partially implemented and were seeing results, and had a plan for full implementation. Unforeseen things can come up and alter the path, but persistence pays off!

What advice do you have for individuals who are new to the Lean Six Sigma community in government?

Lean and Six Sigma processes and tools helps people to think about their jobs in new ways. It works! Show and celebrate results. Don't take short cuts; **follow the process!** Be positively persistent.

On a personal level, are there any facts or tidbits that your colleagues might find interesting or surprising?

I've been practicing and teaching yoga for 25 years and will continue to do so!