

## SBTI

**These Six Sigma pioneers are creating long-term healthcare partnerships by eliminating common universal process problems and bringing substantial savings to the bottom line.**



**M**any healthcare providers are trying to become Six Sigma and lean organizations. There are a lot of companies out there that claim to offer a path to improved efficiency, and by extension, improved financial performance. According to Dr. Ian Wedgwood, vice president at Sigma Breakthrough Technologies Inc. (SBTI), commitment to long-term partnerships is what differentiates the company from its competitors.

SBTI is a pioneer and leader in the Six Sigma and lean methodologies transforming many businesses. Its CEO, Dr. Stephen Zinkgraf, is one of the principle architects of the Six Sigma concept and founded the company in 1997. SBTI's first clients were large corporations like Johnson & Johnson, Polaroid, and Kodak, which helped SBTI establish a global footprint quickly. Wedgwood said Dr. Zinkgraf keeps SBTI

focused on doing what is right for the client, insisting on strengthening relationships through integrity.

The company is based in San Marcos, Texas, with a domestic office in New Jersey. Global SBTI offices exist in Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Though the company's offices tend to house a few individuals working on sales and marketing efforts, the vast majority of its employees are usually working within clients' facilities.

SBTI is a consulting and training group that passes on its skills, methods, and experience to clients, a process called Knowledge Transfer Technology. SBTI's success stems



**Dr. Ian Wedgwood,**  
vice president

[www.sbtionline.com](http://www.sbtionline.com)  
HQ San Marcos, Texas  
Services Six Sigma & lean  
process improvement



from instilling a top-down strategic mentality about Six Sigma and lean. The company takes a client's executive team of directors and managers and walks them through the process of properly identifying and selecting projects most important to an organization's strategic goals and stressing why their support is critical to achieving the goals set. SBTI also helps determine the managers in positions to be key project leaders. These "black belts" then receive 20 days of training over a period of about 14 weeks.

Consultants and clients then systematically work through a five-phase roadmap beginning with defining the projects, recognizing why it is the right thing to work on, understanding the client's customers' needs, and determining how to measure a project's success. Whereas traditional improvement initiatives start with coming up with an idea and then trying to

prove it, SBTI's process is reversed. The first three steps, centered around defining, measuring, and analyzing a process, allows SBTI's clients to bring many ideas to the table with the hopes of identifying the best possible answer.

"Most healthcare processes have been designed over time and patched together, handed off to new leaders who aren't change management or process improvement experts," said Wedgwood. "We place a lot of emphasis on fundamentally rethinking processes."

Wedgwood also said the most important part of any project is the control phase, identified as a big problem in most healthcare environments. Improvements are often lost when employees slip back into previous routines within a matter of months after traditional projects.

### Advantages of great relationships

SBTI viewed the healthcare industry as a strategic growth opportunity about five years ago after performing some pro bono work for a hospital near its headquarters. After realizing many healthcare process problems were systemic and widespread, the company engaged in a number of projects to design and understand the best methods for fixing the industry's problems and improving the processes. One early key client is Columbus Regional Hospital (CRH) in Columbus, Ind.

Trying to fulfill its strategic plans led CRH to seek out SBTI's help on some non-financial projects. As the hospital was planning to finance and build new patient towers, it refocused its

program with projects that would bring quick financial returns. Driven by its CFO, Marlene Weatherwax, projects began to show remarkable results. Not a part of CRH's plan, the flood in the Ohio River Valley this past summer devastated the hospital. Hospital management decided to keep staff

on, redirecting their efforts into designing better processes throughout, including patient placement and staffing. Thanks to SBTI, CRH's black belt teams, and Six Sigma, CRH generated \$14 million in bottom line improvement savings.

SBTI's deployment strategy is to provide clients with the technical tools and train employees to continue the process as well as to assure that improvements stay improved. SBTI's growth in the healthcare industry has come mostly through referrals from satisfied clients, a true sign that success breeds more success. With healthcare now an important segment for its growth, SBTI is dedicating more resources to the sector. Existing employees with experience working on projects in other industries are being exposed to the healthcare segment.

"Many healthcare organizations dabbled with Six Sigma and it didn't work, so they question if it is the right

thing to do. The benefit of our approach is that, rather than mass market to hundreds of organizations, we partner with our clients," Wedgwood said. "In Columbus, they are so thrilled with what we do that we are seen as an integral part of their organization, and their CMO Tom Sonderman said many people there probably think that our people are actually employees of CRH."

Seeing the advantages their methodology offers to healthcare in the US, SBTI is taking that expertise into foreign markets. Though there are major differences in healthcare funding across international lines, internal processes are very similar. "We are in the very early days of our international healthcare segment, while in the US we are well positioned and looking for additional people," said Wedgwood. SBTI has already begun working with providers in France and Hong Kong.

What drives SBTI's success is a passion for helping clients improve their businesses. Based on a fundamental strategy that helped build its business, SBTI invests deeply in hiring the right people. Establishing and maintaining integral relationships with clients allows SBTI to dig deeper into clients' situations and provide them with outstanding, transferable, and sustainable results. Willing to share experiences, many of its leaders have literally written the books on using metrics to guide process improvements.

"We have the thought leaders in our industry," Wedgwood concluded. "We are always driving and proving new methodologies to deliver breakthrough results to our clients." +

—Eric Slack

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## 1 in 18,329.

When a midwest regional hospital called on SBTI to improve upon their delivery time for the first dose of medication to the nursing unit, they received a bonus. Using Lean Sigma tools, our consultants decreased the overall mean time by more than 50 percent, while greatly reducing the error rate of the medication delivered to an outstanding 1 in 18,329. Quicker delivery times and reduced risk of errors means happier and safer patients. **Now That's Breakthrough.**



**From Start To Breakthrough.**

**Sigma Breakthrough Technologies, Inc.**  
123 N. Edward Gary, San Marcos, TX 78666  
[www.sbtionline.com](http://www.sbtionline.com) [info@sbtimail.com](mailto:info@sbtimail.com) 888.752.7070