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in New York

Six Sigma expert Subir Chowdhury wins SME gold medal

Six Sigma is a management strategy towards achieving perfection in quality. The strategy is now a movement, fast spreading among corporations in the United States and India.

Hailed as its leader is Subir Chowdhury, an IIT alumnus who is now executive vice-president of the American Supplier Institute, a premier consulting and training firm of Six Sigma management strategy and quality engineering, in Livonia, Michigan.

One of his books, *The Power of Six Sigma: An Inspiring Tale of How Six Sigma is Transforming the Way We Work*, has become an international bestseller, translated into 15 languages with over 350,000 copies sold worldwide.

Author of seven acclaimed management books, he also co-authored with Japanese quality guru Dr Genichi Taguchi the technical book *Robust Engineering and Mahalanobis Taguchi System*.

His next book, *Organization 21C: Someday All Organizations Will Lead This Way* is due to be released in September.

For his international efforts to help achieve quality perfection, the Society of Manufacturing Engineers honored him with its international gold medal this year.

The SME, which celebrates its 70th anniversary, is the world's leading professional society that supports manufacturing education.

Headquartered in Dearborn,

Michigan, it has some 50,000 members with 221 senior chapters and 225 student chapters in 70 countries.

The SME gold medal is one of the seven annual international awards of the society, which recognize individuals who have made significant contributions in education, production processes, manufacturing or technology in the industry.

The medal was presented to Chowdhury by SME president Marcus Crofts at its recent annual awards banquet in Dallas, Texas.

A fellow of the Royal Statistical Society who served as chairman of the American Society of Quality-Automotive Division, Chowdhury was honored for his 'outstanding service to the manufacturing engineering profession in technical communications through published literature, technical writings, and lectures,' the SME said.

The New York Times has hailed him as a 'leading quality expert.'

Six Sigma, a statistical measurement of only 3.4 defects per mil-



■ **PERFECTIONIST:** Subir Chowdhury, right, receives the SME gold medal from its president Marcus Crofts

lion opportunities, has been at the core of improved productivity, dramatically increased profits, and improved customer service, Chowdhury told *India Abroad*.

'Six Sigma — the number 6, and the Greek letter sigma — together means something more in business and industry. It represents a

statistical measure and a management philosophy,' he quoted from his book.

'Most companies operate between 3 and 4 Sigma, which means they make between approximately 67,000 and 6,000 mistakes per million chances respectively. If you are operating at 3.8 Sigma that means you're getting it right 99% of the time. Getting it right 99% of the time (and 1% wrong) is the equivalent of 20,000 lost articles of mail every hour. It is 5,000 botched surgical procedures every week. It is 4 accidents per day at major airports!!!'

The American Supplier Institute is a nonprofit, employee-owned company with the mission of helping organizations meet the needs of clients through research, training, implementation and publication on quality improvement techniques.

It was chartered as a nonprofit educational institute in Michigan in 1984. Its board of directors includes representatives of leading automakers and automotive supplier companies.

"I am extremely honored to

receive this prestigious international honor from SME. I will try my best to keep this medal's prestige high in the future through my work," Chowdhury said.

He believes the reason India became the global leader in software is that Indian software firms delivered high quality at the lowest cost.

But he believes India has a long way to go in manufacturing compared to Korea or China. In cost, India has an advantage but if Indian manufacturing organizations focus on fire prevention rather than fire fighting, they will repeat the success of software companies, he points out.

"Indians tend to be good at the technical part, the statistical part, (*but*) what Indians must focus on is the strategic part. I wish India would concentrate on product and process quality improvement," he said.

Chowdhury attributes his ability to achieve success to an open mind and a willingness to learn and understand American culture.

"Americans' strengths are found in the fact that they don't celebrate success for a long time. Instead they strive for new success, embrace their weaknesses, and transform them into strength," he said. "That is why this country is able to advance."