Louise Goeser, vice president, quality, Ford Motor Co.

**Ford’s Formula for Better Vehicles**

***Quality push stresses problem prevention as well as correction.***

A familiar slogan informs us that at Ford, quality is job one. So how’s the company handling job one these days? Read on to get Goeser’s take on Ford’s quality initiatives and their impact on the company’s products and bottom line.

**What’s Ford doing to improve the design of its vehicles?**

Our engineering quality operating system involves basic steps like understanding the boundaries or interfaces of the system or component you’re designing. It also involves making sure there’s not a lot of ‘noise’ that could interfere with the proper function of the system. This noise might be variability in production or different environments that the component may be in that take away from the desired outcome.

**What engineering initiatives have you implemented recently?**

We’ve changed a lot of what we do in support of our engineering operations from a quality standpoint. We do process coaching and assess the teams on how they follow the [proper] steps.

**How has the company boosted manufacturing quality?**

Something new is what we call ‘Every Issue Every Day.’ Every customer feedback feeds into our plant. And literally every issue every day gets assigned to the appropriate ‘variability reduction team,’ as we call it. We have something like 13 of these teams. If something comes in that affects sheet metal, it would go to the sheet metal variability reduction team. We drive each issue back to the operator station where it could have first been seen. [The object is to determine] how to contain [the problem] right away and the permanent corrective action.

**How is your approach to quality changing?**

Each year, we raise the level of performance we expect. As we do that, we keep moving upstream to prevention. A mature quality operating system doesn’t rely on catching errors and fixing them. It goes back to each operation and makes it capable and/or error proof. If it’s capable, you can be confident that the operation will be done within the specs every time. If it’s error proof, you know that every time you do [it] you’ve gotten it right.

**What new tools is the company using to improve quality?**

Six sigma has become a very powerful source of improvement in the company. When you find some problems, you can very quickly figure out what needs to be done. But others are more elusive or complicated. When you get elusive or complicated problems, the powerful methodology of six sigma becomes extremely useful.

**Can you give an example of how you’re using six sigma?**

We’re using a problem-solving process we call DMAIC, which stands for ‘define, measure, analyze, improve, and control.’ It’s a very sophisticated use of data and statistics to truly understand the root cause of an issue and solve it permanently.

**What have been the results of your quality initiatives?**

We now have 19 recommended buys in *Consumer Reports*, which is one less than Toyota and more than all of our other competitors. We’ve also had a 16 percent improvement in our JD Power IQS scores over the last two years, which is well above the industry average. In the last year, [Ford’s scores] improved while the other four major [automakers] either didn’t improve as much or declined.

**Are there other ways to measure your progress?**

In our six sigma process, we’ve done almost 9000 projects that have delivered over $1.3 billion to the bottom line by eliminating waste. Not doing it right the first time creates a tremendous amount of rework and waste in the system. I think one of the best kept secrets is that you can improve quality and [reduce] costs at the same time.

*Goeser oversees quality initiatives in the design, manufacture, sale, and service of Ford vehicles and components.*

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