

CASE STUDY

American Express

PRACTICE TOPICS

SIX SIGMA
THE CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE
STANDARDS AND
MEASUREMENTS
MANAGEMENT AND
SUPERVISION

- **Blending entertainment, learning and practice**
- **Explaining complex concepts through live, humorous scenes**
- **Practicing management and coaching skills**

American Express asked us to blend entertainment with learning and a healthy dose of practice at their retreat for the top 600 people in their Consumer Card division.

We created “The History Express,” humorous scenes of events in history that illustrated customer service through the ages and introduced many of the themes of the conference, including benchmarking, the customer experience, and Six Sigma.

The eight sections of “The History Express” ranged from prehistoric times, through ancient Greece, Columbus’ voyage, the American Revolution, Custer’s Last Stand, and on into an imagined future where Universe Express runs an error-free customer-service operation from the moon.

Here’s an example of how we explained the complicated concept of Six Sigma error rates. The scene takes place during the American Revolution, in the cold winter at Valley Forge. Two freezing soldiers are happy to see the quartermaster arrive:

Soldier 1.

Oh, sir, glad to see you. The men are freezing. We’ll die if we don’t get some blankets tonight.

Quartermaster.

We’re working on it. My supplier is very reliable. They have a 3 Sigma defect rate on filling orders. Those blankets should be here any minute.

Soldier 2.

Blankets for all of us! Thank you, sir!

Quartermaster.

Well, maybe not quite all of you. At 3 Sigma...let’s see...that’s a 93% defect-free operation. With 12,000 soldiers here, we’re going to get blankets to 93% of you. That means only 840 of you will freeze to death. That’s pretty good!

Soldier 1.

Not if you’re the one who’s freezing to death! I’m getting out of here.

Soldier 2.

Me, too. Rule Britannia! (exit)

Interactors also presented two practice exercises in which learners coached characters into more effective behavior. The first, a martial-arts themed situation (inspired by the Six Sigma term “Black Belt”), asked participants to help an aspiring Six Sigma expert learn from her mistakes. The second, on the Customer Experience, showed a hapless customer, two failing customer service workers, and their ineffective manager. Again, after watching the situation, the participants coached the characters to create a better experience for the workers and the customer.

The American Express executives enjoyed the program. Three years later our client asked us to adapt the scenes and create new material for a conference at a different large corporation.