

# Bill Smith - Motorola Engineer - Product hero

## Who is Bill Smith?

William B. Smith, Jr. (1929 - 1993) may not be a household name, yet the world of business would look very different without his work.

Hailing from Brooklyn, New York, Smith had already built up quite an impressive resume before joining Motorola in 1987. Having studied at the University of Minnesota School of Management, as well as graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy, Smith spent 35 years working in engineering and quality assurance.

Smith had spent years trying to convince executives to try his new system, but it wouldn't be 'till his time with Motorola that his greatest work, Six Sigma, would come to fruition. While his work contributed to billions of dollars in Motorola's back pocket, Smith remained a salaried employee and didn't share in those profits. That's not to say his efforts went unnoticed, as Smith earned himself and the company plenty of accolades, including the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, presented to the company by the President of the United States.

Smith's methodology was present in everything he did, even in his personal life. He was known for planning out *everything*, whether it was repairing a watch, fixing a car or even learning how to play an instrument. Much to the bookies dismay, Smith even created a program that would predict the outcome of horse racing, leading to a life-long hobby. With that kind of attitude towards his personal life, it's no surprise that Bill excelled in everything he put his mind to.

## What is Bill Smith known for?

In the decade leading up to Smith's arrival at Motorola, the company was in a little bit of a quandary. John F. Mitchell was on his way to becoming President and COO as he met with other senior staffers to address a quality issue across the entire product-line. Mitchell enacted a culture change within the company as well as bringing in a fresh face to consult with.

As a perfectionist at work and at home, Smith took to his new role within Motorola like a duck to water. Mitchell had already done great work in improving quality, but Smith had a trick up his sleeve that would change not only Motorola, but businesses across the world.

Six Sigma was finally brought to life.

This game-changing methodology combines a series of proven principles and techniques in order to optimize business processes.

Within its early years, Six Sigma gained Smith plenty of accolades. He personally received the 'Motorola CEO Quality Award' in 1986 for his efforts, while the company went on to gain the prestigious 'Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award' just a couple of years later. This was an achievement that, without a doubt, wouldn't have been possible without the work of Bill Smith.

Unfortunately, Smith's unexpected passing in 1993 meant the father of Six Sigma was unable to see his methodology spread across the world of business (and even a mention in the comic strip, Dilbert) like he had always hoped. However, in his final years he was able to travel far and wide to promote the benefits of adopting Six Sigma.

## What is Six Sigma and how can it help modern product managers?

Six Sigma is a methodology that is proven to optimize key processes within businesses and aims to remove any defects that may occur using other quality assurance practices. By taking William Edwards Deming's 'quality circle' and improving upon it, Six Sigma's process can lead to a defect level as low as 3.4 times in a million.

In order to achieve such an incredible rate, the Six Sigma methodology takes you through a five-phase process, laid out as follows:

- Define,
- Measure,
- Analyse,
- Improve,
- Control.

Following Six Sigma leads to an increase in efficiency and quality, which in turn leads to a higher return on investment down the line.

In a climate where customers demand the best quality, Six Sigma shines as a methodology all businesses should adopt. Companies already working under Six Sigma are reaping the benefits that come with it. High quality products and business processes lead to sky-high customer satisfaction which, as we all know, is key to sustaining a strong consumer base and brand loyalty. Six Sigma offers practical tools that allow the business to map out the requirements of their customer base, which will help guide the improvement process.

Alongside the benefits at a customer level, there are also budgetary benefits to Six Sigma. For businesses struggling with quality control, there are a number of ways to attempt to fix the issues such as large-scale investing, or even undergoing a restructuring of the business. Unfortunately, these are costly processes and more often than not, a long-drawn out process that isn't guaranteed to work. However, Six Sigma is a process with large benefits without putting a dent in the budget, and don't forget, a business with fewer mistakes is a business that spends less.

### FAQs

Q1: Who is Bill Smith?

Born in Brooklyn, New York, William B. Smith, Jr. (1929 - 1993) is hailed as the 'father of Six Sigma'. Smith graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1952 and studied at the Carlson School of Management.

Smith worked for 35 years in quality assurance and engineering before joining Motorola as Vice President and Senior Quality Assurance Manager for the Land Mobile Products Sector.

Q2: What is Motorola?

Motorola, Inc. was a telecommunications company based in Illinois. The company is credited with pioneering the mobile phone and, until the company split in 2011, was responsible for designing and selling wireless network equipment. Currently, the company is split into two, with Motorola Solutions, Inc. acting as the legal successor to the original company.

Q3: What is Six Sigma?

Six Sigma is a business methodology which aims to minimize defects within the manufacturing industry. Split into five processes, Six Sigma expands on William Edwards Deming's quality circle. Following the Six Sigma methodology can lead to enhanced efficiency, high customer satisfaction and budgetary benefits