

MOTOROLA AND SIX SIGMA

Excerpts from the 1994 book, QUALITY WARS: THE TRIUMPHS AND DEFEATS OF AMERICAN BUSINESS

BY JEREMY MAIN

THE BEGINNING: AN EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

Motorola, recalls its retired chairman Robert W. Galvin, woke up to a clarion call from one of its most respected executives, Arthur Sundry, at a meeting of company officers in April, 1979. Sundry announced he had something more important to say than anything on the agenda — which was, as he put it baldly, that Motorola's quality "stinks." "You can be motivated by all manner of approaches," says Galvin. But the threat from Japan lay under all the other motivations.¹

MOTOROLA'S LUCKY BREAK

Even when there was no direct threat from Japan, American companies heard a strong message from across the Pacific. Motorola may have been awakened by Art Sun-

dry's cry that Motorola's quality "stinks." "That was a lucky break for us, that we had someone who had the guts to do that and caused all the rest of us who were sitting there to say, 'if Art says that, maybe there's something to it,'" Bob Galvin states. "There was no denial or rejection of Art Sundry's message [and] the following Monday morning, everybody came to work and had some, at least subliminal intent, 'I will do it a little better today.'" Motorolans may have been preconditioned to Sundry's words by what had happened to their old Quasar plant in Franklin Park, Illinois. Before Matsushita bought the plant from Motorola in 1974, the TV sets coming off the line had 140 problems per 100 sets. By the end of the decade Matsushita, with the same work force and management, had reduced the problems to 7 per 100 sets. (In justice to

Motorola, we should note that it already had decided to quit the television business and was not giving the Quasar plant the resources it needed.)"

THE LEADERS: THE WRONG STUFF

A LESSON IN PERFECTION:
GALVIN OF MOTOROLA

Bob Galvin has served 52 years in the company founded by his father and uncle in 1928 to make a "battery eliminator" that allowed owners of radios to plug right in to the household current. He learned about perfectibility early on. He went to grade school at St. Jerome's in Chicago, where the nuns had high standards. He remembers one in particular, his math teacher, Sister Mary Norbadet, who announced one day that she would not accept any grade less than 100 on a forthcoming test on conversions. "Scared the hell out of me," he says, but his parents supported the teacher and Galvin did score 100. Galvin was at Motorola 40 years before he made perfection the company's quality standard.

Like [Hewlett-Packard CEO John] Young, he set a goal that would make Motorola wake up and stretch itself. Galvin called for a ten-fold improvement in quality in five