



Quality is NOT a one man job!

There seems to be a perception in certain organizations that quality only relates to the quality of a product produced and that this is only the responsibility of the quality inspector. But they cannot be more wrong! Quality should be part and parcel of everything that we do!

- The quality of the message taken by the receptionist while you are out of the office is important. If the receptionist got the name or number wrong it could prevent you from returning a very important call.
- The quality of the driver checking the quantity of the goods he collects can result in an inadvertent production line stoppage if he fails to collect the right quantity of goods.
- The quality of the information received in a report can save you the time from having to redo it or if the quality is poor, it can disguise an underlying problem and lead you to take an incorrect decision.
- The quality of the service provided by your security guards can prevent a burglary.

The examples can go on and on, but from the few examples listed one can clearly deduce that doing quality work in its most basic form is merely the act of consistently and without fail adhering to the standards set out for you to perform to. It is about consistent conformance to requirements.

Looking at it from this perspective it is clear that everyone should focus every single day on improving the quality in their area of work. The question is... are you? And how do we then get a quality culture established in an organization?

Q = Quizzical looks must be eliminated

The first step in establishing a quality culture is to clarify expectations. If we are not clear on what we expect of our internal suppliers, we set them up for failure right from the start. What do you expect of those that provide you with information for example? Do you have specific requirements in terms of which formats to use, what types of graphs to use, what they must do if they will not be able to meet a deadline, should they include an explanation of any anomalies reflected in the data? You may consider some of these things as common sense, but whenever someone fails to meet your standards, the first question you should ask yourself is whether your instruction was perhaps not clear enough?

U = Unified front

Make improving quality a shared objective - every single person in the organization has to contribute. Imagine what you can achieve if every single person is making one improvement at least every single week. How many improvements would that result in for every year?

A = Action

Emphasis must be on taking action, on doing and getting things implemented. Take care to not be paralyzed by over-planning and over-analysing. Just generating improvement ideas by itself does not create value. Value lies in action. For this to be successful you will have to create an environment in which it is acceptable to make mistakes. This is a very difficult thing to achieve.



It is important to make sure that when we work with problems we do not get emotional or personal. Focus on getting the immediate situation under control. Find the root cause and then make changes to the process to prevent a recurrence in future. Get into the habit of being grateful for every issue highlighted as every single problem identified is an opportunity to improve and to make your business stronger and more resilient in future. Remember that it is always better to find the problem when it is still small – things could always have been worse.

L = Language

The shared language must become data and facts - accept nothing less! No descriptive or emotive words should be allowed when discussing issues. Instead of using words like “most” we need to be clear, so for example “of the 15 we have tested in the last hour, 9 failed” would be considered a much preferred alternative. Training must also be provided so that everyone understands and speaks the same language. People need to be able to communicate accurately and describe what issues they are experiencing and they need to have practical knowledge of problem solving skills, as well as what is needed to perform their work to the required standard.

I = Information

There must be a process, known to all and easy to use, to record any changes made and to communicate both up and down the business’ hierarchy, as well as across functions. This will enable people to highlight potential issues with implemented changes and to track back if changes had unplanned negative effects.

T = The goal is fixed, but the means are not

The goal is that everyone works towards improving quality in a structured way, but allow people sufficient freedom to apply their own creativity and use initiative when solving problems and implementing improvements. You will be amazed by the results!

Y = Why?

People must be able to explain why they have made a certain change to avoid changing just for the sake of change. You may want to define specific categories (with inputs from your staff) such as saving time, saving money or reducing variability. These categories can always be expanded over time. Make sure that your team members know how to do a proper and accurate cost benefit calculation and also make sure that the long term view is taken on improvements and not only the short term view. Also remember that no improvement is too small!

These are but a few general guidelines and by no means an exhaustive list, but it is a great place to start and extremely powerful if done right!

Our Continuous Improvement and Supply Chain experts are assisting businesses in and around Cape Town to Continuously Improve and Adapt To Change. With more than 40 years practical experience – we know how to reduce your costs and make your business better!

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