Hands-on Management

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ISO Helpful Hints, Part 1

Why does a surface finisher pursue compliance or registration to the ISO standards? There are various reasons for a company to become ISO-registered. Fewer audits from individual customers, for example, is just one major advantage. Any audit of an ISO-certified finisher would only serve to emphasize that company's strengths, because the structure of the quality manual and the company policies are modeled after ISO practices.

Customers are looking for finishers with superior quality levels. Currently, many companies use ISO 9000 as an instrument to evaluate suppliers. By not complying with these standards, your company could lose business to others that are ISO-certified.

Certification—It's Just the First Step

When the certification procedure is concluded, the process is far from over. The registering firm will return frequently (every six months) to complete system reviews. After the trials of obtaining the initial certification, motivation is especially tough to maintain. People have a tendency to "coast" after the big push, so the short time span between audits helps keep people on their toes.

My company is slowly moving toward ISO 9002 compliance, and I would like to share a few observations that might make your trip a little easier.

First, as a good resource, rely on your customers that have or are pursuing ISO compliance or registration. I gleaned most of what follows from my customers, because I found that they are more than willing to help finishers comply with the standards.

Manual Tiers

The manual tiers become more detailed as you go from policy to work instructions.

Tier 1: Policy
"The finisher shall ..."—quote the standard freely.
Tier 2: Who Does It?
Use job titles instead of names.
Tier 3: Work Instructions
How is it done? Make this production-line based.
Tier 4: Forms
Everything *must* be controlled!

Block diagrams can be used to support the process and work instructions. These diagrams can range from the very simple to extremely complex arrangements, which can be expanded with supporting documentation at the appropriate places. Remember: A picture is worth a thousand words.

Everything must be signed off—a procedure that indicates review and approval. From the quality manual to the forms, always include places for the numerous sign-offs required.

Because it is subject to change with the next issue of the standard, I don't recommend using the ISO numbering system in your quality manual. (Note: This suggestion carries the least support from outside sources I have consulted; however, I still feel that using the standard numbering may cause needless work.)

All departments should be assigned a unique two-letter identification code. For example:

- Plating—PT
- Shipping—SH

You get the picture. In the same manner, work instructions, forms and process instructions should also have a unique two-letter identification assigned, such as:

- Work instructions—WI
- Process instructions—PI

In this way, the code "WIPT-1" would translate as the first work instruction in plating.

Policy Reviews

Just as the pyramid shape helps define the tiers of manuals, reviews are more frequent for the policies at tier three than at tier one. For example:

- Once a year—Review company goals, both long- and short-range.
- Twice a year—Upper management critiques the process.
- Twice a year—Upper management reviews customer trends and needs.
- Twice a week—Managers review the quick items: Quality problems, process technicalities, paperwork issues.

Next month's column will continue this discussion, and will focus on the forms and controls required to maintain certification. **P&SF**