



Hands-on Management

Fred Mueller, CEF
Pottstown Plating Works
Washington St. & Industrial Hwy.
Pottstown, PA 19464

Quality Begins at the Curb

Recently, I have been thinking in depth about all the new quality programs in our industry. Pottstown Plating Works has a 10-year-old program based on Ford Motor Company's Q-101—and it works fine. Programs that are in place this long function for issues like the hold area, certification, order review, defective material reports, and the standard quality items. Wow! Just look at that shiny new ISO 9000 program. Maybe I should take it out for a spin around the block. But, I know what you're thinking—it's the 90s and you are doing more with a lot less. Where do you find the time?

What is Quality?

As I look around at the professional quality organizations, I observe two distinct viewpoints expressed. The first is very heavy into machining and tooling studies and uses numerical tools and control charts to measure quality. The other concerns employee empowerment and quality circles as the path to business utopia. During the 1970s and '80s, American industry was inundated by a sea of alphabet soup of the latest and greatest new quality programs. Each one was supposedly better than the one that preceded it. Fad quality programs sprang up faster than mushrooms. Immediately following were rumors about the harm that could be caused by a quality program run amuck.

I know I would have been very reluctant during that period to champion these changes in my workplace. I also read, however, about the incredible successes by such companies as Harley-Davidson, which was saved from the brink of disaster by a huge increase in quality, powered from the top and spread throughout the organization. They

blended the best of the two schools of quality with a program that focused on generating savings.

I have overstated the examples to make a point about the extremes that can surface in the pursuit for quality. There are many pathways to improve your working environment. Select the quality tools that fit you and your workplace.

For me, *quality starts at the curb*. Customers observe quality—or a lack of it—in every facet of your company's presentation. From a neat and courteous truck driver to an understandable billing statement—everything communicates the quality of a company. Do not forget the physical plant, a fresh coat of paint, better lighting, and so on. Improve the areas that proclaim you are proud of what you do and who you are.

What About People?

The ability to change an organization must reside within the employees. Don't look now, but here comes the tricky part. Management needs to balance the control of the process (the numbers stuff), through which the standards are achieved, with the power of the employee over workplace parameters (the empowerment stuff), through which comes employee responsibility.

W. Edwards Deming believes that there are two main roles to be filled by the leadership of an organization: To assist employees who need individual help, and to improve the system.

A thought from *Teaching the Elephant to Dance*, by James S. Belasco, PhD: "One word of caution, which you're probably feeling already: Don't overdo it! Establish the urgency to change without destroying your employees' self-confidence and perceived ability to win. The tag line 'We can do better!' can accomplish

the dual purposes of creating the need to change and building belief that change is possible."

Unfortunately, by working for positive change, it's possible that just the opposite may occur. Problems may appear that have bubbled below the surface for years. Don't let your expectations, and those of your people, outrun your ability to deliver. I would like to stress the need to make it "very clear" to everyone involved in a quality program that every business has limited resources, so it is all right to have a mix of projects that lean toward the easiest items to fix, especially in the beginning.

General Electric's Hawthorn study took an early look at ways to increase productivity. The lighting intensity was slowly raised over a few weeks, and productivity improved. The curves matched up with good correlation. The investigator spent his time surveying and getting to know the employees. Then the lights were lowered, and productivity still went up. These employees had responded to the personal treatment and not to the change in lighting. Quality programs with a strong management interaction with the employees (such as ISO) have a better chance of accomplishing the objectives in today's business. Quality is caring. *P&SF*

The first; more to come ...

This is the first in a series for this new column, which will cover a wide range of management and quality issues—from a practical manager's viewpoint. Fred Mueller, CEF (AESF Philadelphia Branch), has more than 30 years' experience in the metal finishing industry. His background includes printed circuit board wet processing, plating for electronics, and commercial shop plating, as production manager, quality assurance manager and technical director. For six years, he was a plating instructor at Temple University.