

Achieving Quality Through Teamwork

Quality and Teamwork

Over many years, the industrial world has created a lot of mystique around the concept of quality, how to achieve it, and how to maintain it. There have been many strategies, programs, and processes invented for many different industries on how to address this issue. In order to attain the state of highest quality in our products, we must understand what quality really is:

- *Quality is a perception more than a reality.* In order for a product or service to be ranked high on quality surveys, it must be thought to be of high quality by a large number of people. When this perception of quality is widely accepted by others, it puts the product or service above its competition in such a way that the consumer will not only prefer it over similar products on the market but will also be willing to pay more for it
- *Quality is consistent.* To be considered “high quality” a product or service must be highly predictable in all circumstances. It must give the same consistent “feel” or performance time after time with only a minimum of failure or disappointment. Though quality is a perception it must be backed up with a record of dependability and consistent performance that is documented or “vouched for” by many end users.
- *Quality is value.* Value is knowing that you are getting what you expect in both the actual product as well as the service during and after the sale. High value is a feeling one gets when the product or service exceeds the expectations or parameters that were set prior to the sale.

High value is manifested in the positive feelings or pride one feels in owning that particular product or having experienced outstanding service. This feeling is then transmitted to other consumers by “word of mouth.”

- *Quality is a mindset.* In order for our customers to perceive our product or service as high quality, it must start with those who produce it. Each employee must understand both the process and the philosophy behind the product or service in order to consistently meet the customer’s expectations.

Getting your employees to adopt a quality mindset is the real key to producing high quality products and services. Employees must feel a sense of ownership. That is, they must feel responsible for the outcome of anything connected with the product or service. One always takes better care of something that they own as opposed to something that they do not. With ownership, employees will feel a sense of pride when hearing that their product or service has the highest reputation in the market place.

To instill a sense of ownership, employees must feel that they play an important role in the success of the product. This is done through teamwork. A team is defined as a collection of individuals who rely on group collaboration in order to achieve specific goals and objectives. Team members contribute their individual thoughts and expertise to the team and bear different responsibilities in the fulfillment of the team’s objectives.

The real experts in any process are almost always the ones actually doing the job, not the ones that write about it in theory. A well run team makes experts out



of everyone and takes advantage of the experience and knowledge possessed by its members, therefore allowing everyone to “own” a part of the product or service. Once employees feel attached to the outcome of the process, they will have achieved the quality mindset necessary in order to meet or exceed the expectations of the customer.

Building Effective Teams

Teambuilding is a processes that takes time, training and perseverance. Successful teamwork requires the right attitudes and a firm commitment from all involved. Often the entire “culture” of the workplace itself must go through some significant changes to be conducive to a teamwork philosophy. The maintenance of this philosophy is an ongoing process that must be reinforced. The transition and implementation of this process is best accomplished using an experienced outside trainer or facilitator that can work with your teams objectively while taking you through exercises designed to enhance team cohesiveness. However, the process can be accomplished in-house, provided that management has an understanding of the dynamics of teams and have the motivation, time and resources to adequately facilitate this transition; progress toward successful team performance will vary greatly depending on these factors. The following material is designed to give supervisors an overview of what to expect during this process, as well as several activities and recourses to assist them.

Special attention may be needed when building teams with employees from other cultures. Cultural awareness education/training should precede or coincide with teambuilding efforts as other cultures, particularly the Hispanic culture, are used to a much stricter, more hierarchical management structure.

Creating a Team Environment

The first step in the successful implementation of teams is to create a working environment that promotes employee involvement and participation. Input from all employees should be encouraged and expected. In this system, employees are treated with dignity and respect; job satisfaction is achieved through the pursuit of common goals; and, all resources, talents and energies are focused to insure long-term success for everyone evolved.

In this environment, decision-making is encouraged at the closest possible level to the implementation of those decisions. The employees who are most affected by the decisions being made are usually the people who can provide the best information for the basis of those decisions. Further, if employee commitment to the implementation of a new decision is expected, input from these employees must be included in order to foster that commitment. Through the use of teams, responsibility for the effectiveness and success of an area is shared by all employees. This can work only when everyone is empowered to help in making changes and improvements.

Trust and good communication are essential. Team members must be able to communicate openly and freely and to be able to rely on the information conveyed to achieve team objectives. When supervisors begin to seek employees input and entrust them with key responsibilities, it is seen as a gesture of trust. By setting this example, supervisors will promote trust among the team members and they will learn to reciprocate that trust.

Working together cannot be considered a policy or a code of rules. It is instead an ideal that employees must be inspired to believe in. It cannot be imposed - it must be promoted and fostered by leaders. Working along side each other might get the job done but it does not achieve the same result as working together. Our country's history makes it clear that combining all efforts into one has been the only way to achieve the progress and strength we now take pride in... pride in knowing that we achieved it together with the same vision.

Team Dynamics

It is important to understand that teams must go through necessary stages of growth and development before they can consistently perform to expectations. These stages are referred to as *Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing*:

1. *Forming* - In the beginning, it is normal for team members to be filled with feelings of anticipation and optimism as well as fear and anxiety as questions about how the group will behave and operate arise.
2. *Storming* - As team members get to know and get used to each other, fluctuations in attitude, as well as feelings of defensiveness and competition may arise.
3. *Norming* - Team members will start to settle in as they begin to understand and accept their roles and responsibilities and adopt a sense of common goals and objectives.
4. *Performing* - The team is performing to expectations. Team members feel a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

Progressing through these stages can be an emotional roller coaster but it is important to remember that it is a normal process in a team's development.

Characteristics of an Effective Team

Once a team is performing effectively the following characteristics will be clearly recognizable:

- *Clear roles and expectations* - A common problem in most groups is that team members do not clearly understand what their role is and what to expect of other team members. Clarifying one's role, as well as the expectations of other team members, assures that each person knows his/her responsibilities. This greatly enhances success possibilities and assures that key tasks are not overlooked.
- *Cooperation* - Cooperation is vital in an interdependent work group. For success, cooperation must be rewarded and reinforced by superiors as it is an essential element in team integrity.
- *Support* - Team members support one another in their work efforts and understand that it is standard operating procedure to "take up the slack" when others are unable or experiencing difficulties. As need for leadership arises, various members take the initiative and volunteer as needed.
- *Communication* - Members effectively and fluidly exchange needed information and ideas on a consistent basis.
- *Trust* - Members trust one another, revealing to the group what they would be reluctant to expose to others and respecting the responses they receive. They can freely express negative reactions without fearing reprimand.
- *Problem solving* - When problems arise, the situation is carefully diagnosed before action is proposed. The team focuses on the causes of the problem rather than people or personalities. Consensus is sought and members stand behind decisions made by the group.
- *Adaptability* - The team is flexible and seeks new and better ways of doing things. Individuals are creative, continually changing and growing to achieve goals and meet the needs of the customer.

- *Shared vision/sense of mission* - Team members have a clear understanding of the team's goals and feel involved in the process of achieving them. The ownership principle is the powerful group dynamic concept that is put into play in any solid team effort. A shared purpose captures the synergistic energies of the group in a very powerful way and releases strong motivation for working through roadblocks and common problems.

Management must actively support the teams and insure that team members receive the proper training have access to all essential resources they need. Thorough feedback on the teams progress should be a regular part of this support mechanism as well as positive reinforcement and recognition for achievement.

Team Members

Just as effective teams have certain key characteristics, so do also effective team members. An effective team member is committed to the team's goals and understands his/her role and the role of the other team members in the achievement of those goals. They are effective communicators who keep an open mind while supporting their position and actively seeking the input of others. Characteristics of an effective team member include:

- Openness to feedback
- Acceptance of responsibility for members' behaviors
- Provides feedback to other team members
- Takes initiative
- Concerned about winning
- Willingness to let others win occasionally
- Willingness to confront and stand up on important issues
- Attacks problems, not people
- Being a good listener
- Willingness to change
- Willingness to lead when necessary
- Eagerness to learn new things

These characteristics can be used to identify potential team members as well as guide and reinforce behaviors of existing team members (see Sample Mission Statement). Team members should strive to embody these qualities, but management must set the example by first exhibiting these qualities itself.

Sample Mission Statement

For the Team Process and Quality Attainment

We dedicate ourselves to the following principles of quality management:

To establish an environment of mutual trust and understanding which provides for the education, safety, training, and empowerment of all "Company" people.

- *Team management will be at the center of our new environment. Utilizing the team approach, our people will assume a participatory role in decision making.*
- *By allowing our people to engage in true problem solving, they will enhance their contributions to the organization, experience personal growth, and create a responsive work environment.*
- *We will provide to all our people the knowledge necessary to enable them to systematically and continuously improve the quality and effectiveness of our efforts.*

To produce and market a consistent product.

- *Our success is dependent upon the attainment of a superior quality product that can be sold at competitive prices in the markets we serve.*
- *We have a duty to insure that our business produces a reasonable profit which supplies the opportunity for growth and job security*

To develop and operate an interruption-free manufacturing process.

- *Our vision is relentless attention to the detail of our processes. We commit to the use of statistical tools to fully understand the true capabilities of our processes.*

To manufacture products which meet the defined acceptability criteria for customers, both internal as well as external.

- *We will actively pursue a renewed understanding of our customers' real needs. We commit ourselves to intensifying our efforts in true customer dialogue.*

To meet the promised delivery quantities and timing requirements of our customers.

- *Service is of paramount importance in the product package we market and is critical to establishing a true image in the market place.*

Teambuilding Activities & Resources

As stated earlier, teambuilding is a process that takes time. It is best to hire an objective outside facilitator to assist you in making the transition to this new environment. For assistance in this process you may contact: Holladay Management Services, Inc. (www.holladaymanagement.com) or a number of other qualified facilitators.

There are several exercises and activities that you may want to include in this process that would compliment such efforts. One such exercise is called the Airplane Exercise. This exercise is ideal for showing the difference between individual and team effort at work. Participants see how they can increase productivity, efficiency and profitability by working as a team rather than as individuals.

Also consider the following excellent resources:

Kinlaw, Dennis C.. Developing Superior Work Teams: Building Quality and the Competitive Edge. 1991, Lexington Books. ISBN 0-669-34983-1. http://www.timsbookexchange.com/catalog.phtml?cat_parent=1&cat_id=29

Glasser, Rollin. Classic Readings in Self-Managing Team Work. 1991, HRDQ <http://www.hrdq.com/products/classicreadings.htm>

Glasser, Rollin.. Facilitator Behavior Questionnaire: Helping Teams Become Self-Managing. 1991 HRDQ. <http://www.hrdq.com/products/fbq.htm>

Libove, Laurie Ribble., Russo, Eileen M.. Trust: The Ultimate Test. 1997 HRDQ <http://www.hrdq.com/products/trust.htm>

Hall, Jay..The Team Effectiveness Survey. 1996 Teleometrics International, Inc. http://www.teleometrics.com/frontEnd/cm_productDetails.jsp?partNumber=1110&categoryID=11