

# A Climate of Quality

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*Most companies start out small with a total commitment to quality and nurturing strong customer relationships. That's how they survive the first few years and build a following. But as they grow and change, little problems begin to cause huge repercussions. Glitches in manufacturing... Supplier changes... Squabbles among employees... Slow response times... Higher prices... And the complaints come flowing in. How do you maintain quality as your organization grows? How do you motivate large numbers of people to meet consistent goals and standards? Can you maintain that 'small business' feel for the long haul?*

Quality is a basic business principle that has an immense impact on the longevity and profitability of a company. Think of quality as a comprehensive, company-wide effort to raise the standards for products and services. It has a tendency to come in and out of vogue with the business community, but the ramifications of a drop in overall quality can never be overlooked or underestimated.

So, where does quality start? It begins at the top of the organization with a clear vision of short and long-term goals, and benchmarks for customer satisfaction, employee happiness, profitability, acceptable defect rates and supplier partnerships. Total Quality Management is a complex subject that can easily fill several volumes, but in this article I will sum up the key facets of TQM at a basic level that can be applied in any business – large or small.

- **Communicate goals to the entire company.** Everyone involved in your business needs to understand your purpose and aim. Share your ideals and objectives with employees, suppliers, partners and customers - and hold yourself accountable for demonstrating your commitment to quality everyday.
- **Be sure that everyone understands the purpose of quality improvement measures.** Inspections, sampling and record-keeping are annoying, but if people grasp that those practices are in place to raise profitability and reduce costs they are more likely to embrace the annoyance.
- **Reward everyone based on quality and overall performance.** End the practice of awarding business based solely on price. End the practice of paying employees based solely on hours worked. End the practice of measuring success through numerical quotas. Link compensation and partnership decisions directly to quality outputs and real-world results.
- **Train, train, train.** If you want people to perform well, you have to give them the tools and knowledge to be successful. Teach your team members what you want and how to deliver. Then hold them accountable for maintaining and constantly improving quality.
- **Build a climate of trust and competition.** Two things will make your employees and suppliers shine. The first is trust. You must drive out any fear of reprisals and open people up to being creative, innovative and committed to quality ahead of quantity. Second, you should foster a spirit of healthy competition that drives people to do their best and be proud of the quality of their workmanship.
- **Encourage education and self-improvement at every level of the organization.** From owners and managers down to the lowest line worker or janitor, everyone in your company should be constantly learning and growing. This will keep employees engaged, excited and working to improve not only themselves, but the company as a whole.

- **Take action.** Nothing is more frustrating than rhetoric with no action. If your employees, suppliers and partners see that you only give lip service to quality, they will not follow through with results. If your customers sense insincerity, they will leave. To accomplish any transformation there must be visible action and clear tracking of progress.

It's a shame, but Western management has traditionally thought of quality improvement as requiring large, expensive innovations. Technological advancements, robotics, automated testing, new computer systems and lengthy surveys will only go so far. When you get down to the bottom line you realize that quality products and services only come through the dedication of many individuals who come together in their quest to achieve common goals and make customers happy.

Set your sights on continuous quality improvement, small advances, incremental steps and teamwork, and I guarantee that you will see an amazing impact on your revenue, retention and customer satisfaction.