

Peter Sanderson is president of TQMS Inc. You can reach Peter at peter@cissoftware.com.

Managing Changing Expectations: Attitude and Vision

February 5, 2009

Peter Sanderson

Often we forget the most important attributes of achieving success and focus solely on our quality management system. In some instances, the compliance process engulfs us to a point where we believe that success depends on satisfying auditors and having a certificate framed on the entrance wall.

In part two of Managing Changing Expectations, I would like us all to consider two important attributes required for success that are rarely documented in a quality management system-attitude and vision.

Both of these attributes will clearly decide the success of an organization. This never became as apparent as in the last five months during the huge increase in gasoline prices. Customer's expectations changed as the price of fuel went up. Furthermore, environmental pressures started to make headway in the consumer's choices.

I am certain that every automotive manufacturer has a quality management system that is in compliance to internationally accepted standards. Therefore, what is the difference between the profitable companies and the companies in need of financial assistance?

It was clear to me when at the height of the fuel prices I drove by two automotive dealers in my small town. The GM dealer's lot was full of large SUVs, pickup trucks and Cadillacs while the Toyota lot was full of the Yaris, Corolla, Prius, Matrix and a few pickup trucks and SUVs.

While consumer's expectations had changed, Toyota had the products available that met their expectations. In fact, I myself only buy American and called the GM dealer asking about the new Malibu Hybrid that was advertised. The sales person told me that they had not even seen one and did not know when they would receive one.

I believe that it is the attitude of management and the lack of vision that resulted in this type of crisis. This scenario is not limited to only larger corporations and in fact, it is more critical in smaller organizations that do not receive financial assistance when they fail.

In this part two of Managing Changing Expectations, I will further discuss attitude while leaving visioning to part three.

Attitude is something that starts at the top of an organization and flows down to the very bottom. The following are two examples of how attitude can make such a huge difference:

1. Every quality management system includes an element for corrective action. How often do managers resent or even become aggravated and angry when a corrective action is issued to them? Their attitude often suggests that receiving a corrective action reflects negatively on their performance within the organization. However, this is not the case! In fact, it is quite the opposite. When a problem occurs, management establishes key personnel who they feel have the skill sets, experience and management focus to address the problem, determine the root cause and implement an effective long-term solution. This speaks to itself. Therefore, rather than having a negative attitude when receiving a corrective action, managers should understand that the reason they were selected to receive a corrective action is that the executive management has the confidence that they can resolve the issue. That is a compliment and not a negative benchmark on their performance.

2. Often inspection and engineering personnel believe that they are always right (attitude),

regardless of what the customer says. Remember that customer's expectation change for many different reasons. I worked for a company that had shipped the same parts to their customer for years. Suddenly the customer rejected a batch and returned them for a dimensional out of tolerance situation. The inspection and engineering spent days building a case that the particular dimension (although slightly out of tolerance) had not changed since the first batch was shipped and they were all accepted in the past. They made trend analysis, had SPC reports, pictures and loads of inspection paper ready to *argue with the customer*. However, they were surprised to learn that their customer's quality manager had retired and the new quality manager had stepped up their quality inspection of incoming products as part of a continuous improvement program. The bottom line was that the time they spent preparing their case and arguing with the client was the same time that they could have spent correcting the problem. The attitude was the differentiating factor. Their first visit with the new quality manager was on a negative note rather than a positive and supportive note.

Attitude should be part of a management system in the form of continual training and proper explanations of the organization's focus. The quality policy plays an important role in establishing the attitude of personnel throughout the organization. Executive management's reaction to challenging scenarios also affects personnel's attitude. Nevertheless, most importantly is training and indoctrination into the organization. Continual communication and training that reinforces the attitudes that we seek from our personnel is equally (if not more) important than the training of "how to do the job."

The leaders of an organization always establish the attitude by demonstration and investment in training.

Peter Sanderson is president of TQMS Inc. You can reach Peter at peter@cissoftware.com.