

Creating Alignment with the Leadership Team Part 9

OBSESSION FOR QUALITY

Last month we discussed how Deming's focus on quality created a movement and how it took the US longer to recognize the benefits of putting quality first. This month we will further discuss the importance of having an Obsession for Quality and having the data necessary to make the proper decisions when deploying resources.

THINK PAST THE FIX

Organizations have become more and more strained for resources, so we must focus our energies in the right direction. We propose focusing our precious time and energy on preventing a recurring problem rather than simply restoring flow. We must continue to ask ourselves the whys until we understand and discover the root cause of the problems. At which point we must eliminate the problem's cause and standardize to prevent recurrence. Then we must leverage the countermeasure to any similar risk in the organization. Most companies do a great job of restoring flow. Restoring flow is how companies stay in business. However, many companies do a terrible job of "thinking past the fix." Thinking past the fix involves restoring flow and then taking the time to answer the following question, "What can we do to make sure this NEVER happens again?"

VISUAL CONTROL

Due to the complexities involved in the Manufacturing Enterprise, problems will present themselves, so we must use visual control so no problems are hidden. Use simple visual indicators to indicate whether the current condition is a standard one or a deviation from the standard. We like to tell our clients from ten feet and in two seconds, we should be able to determine if there is a deviation to a standard. Design simple, visual systems to support flow and pull. There are different visual controls used. Below are some common groupings that we see in our daily lives:

Visual Indicator - Tells you something (street sign)

Visual Signal - Gets your attention (brake lights)

Visual Control - Places limits on behavior (yellow lines on two-lane highway)

Visual Guarantee - Allows only the correct response (concrete dividers on highway)

Simply having visual controls isn't enough; they must be continually monitored. Practicing proper visual management will uncover many problems for us. How we react to those problems is extremely important.



ERROR PROOFING

Another approach is called Error Proofing (Poka Yoke). Error Proofing is a quality control approach for achieving zero defects. Error Proofing is based on the principle that defects are prevented by controlling a process so that the process cannot produce defects, even when a mistake is made by a machine or a person. Error Proofing recognizes that it is natural for people to make mistakes or fail to notice when an error is made or a machine malfunctions. This doesn't mean that a person is stupid or foolish. If a mistake can be made, it will be made. Leaders who don't understand this typically display a high level of disrespect for their associates. The leaders think they can solve their quality issues by "writing up" everyone. My question to those leaders is, "How is that working for you?" Those same leaders think one can simply inspect quality into the product. When you ask them why they don't stop to fix quality, the answer is, "We don't have time." However, they always have time to make the product 'right' the second time.

The error-proofing system creates devices to prevent errors and keeps those errors from ever turning into defects. There are three levels of Error Proofing:

Level 1 – Device designed to eliminate an error from happening during the assembly/manufacturing process.

Level 2 – Device created to catch a defect at the time it happens to prevent passing on to the next station.

Level 3 – Device created to catch a defect after it happens, typically at the next operation.

Our target is to have as many Level 1 error proofing devices in our processes as possible. If we do our part to design error proofing into our products and processes, we will make it easier for our associates to do the right thing.

CULTURE OF QUALITY

One may decide to implement procedures which highlight the science of quality. One may even have many of those elements in place already. However, those items will be virtually useless without the culture of quality. One can have all of the visual controls and error proofing tools available in place, but if one lacks observant leaders, the controls will be useless. Leaders must be constantly looking for deviations to the standards. Developing a culture of quality has eluded many leaders within their businesses. To truly have a culture of quality, leaders must ensure we have the following in place:

- Problem Exposure: Uncovering problems with excessive inventory, labor and /or capacity.
- Problem Response: Reacting when problems do occur and ensuring root cause and corrective action is taken.
- Problem Solving at the Deepest Level: Supporting and coaching the operators who do the improvement work.

Get AMP'd

The culture of quality is not something that can happen overnight. It will take serious leadership presence and example-setting to create a culture which supports all aspects of quality. We have a concept called AMP, which explains how defects are to be viewed in a customer / supplier relationship. The concept is demonstrated below:



- I should never **A**ccept a defect from my supplier (the previous process).
- I should never **M**ake a defect in my process.
- I should never **P**ass a defect to my customer (the next process).

With this understanding we can make the statement of Don't Accept, Make, or Pass a Defect. If the entire organization understands this concept and the leadership ensures it is being enforced, the quality levels of the product and process will improve. However, if we continue to pass defects from station to station and expect the end-of-line inspection or test to catch it, we will have a higher production cost which will then slip through to our final customers.

When W. Edwards Deming and others started the journey to improved quality, I am not sure if he knew the movement that he would generate within Japan and eventually the world. Quality is the key to winning in today's business world. You can't produce products with poor quality and expect to be successful. There are many examples that have proven that point. Don't let your company be the next example.

Do you have a culture of quality within your business? Do you expose problems rather than ignore them? Have you developed processes that will not create defects? If you answered NO to any of these questions, Drive Inc. can help. We have experienced professionals who can coach your team through the process of gaining alignment around this principle. For a no-obligation introduction meeting, please contact Paul Eakle at paul.eakle@driveinc.com or 865-323-3491. Stay tuned for next month's newsletter when we will discuss the next principle in this series to ensure your leadership team is aligned.

