



Companies who value and encourage employee efforts benefit from commitment, increased investment in success.

Quality of leadership matters – at all employee levels

Leadership isn't always about the top management directing the way for the company. Leadership can be found at all levels of the company in terms of organizational structure. And even though AS9100 requirements for quality management systems indicate "top management," it is also the "lower" part of the organization that is equally accountable and even influential. From the president to the shop floor worker and everyone in between, it is the collective of the team that defines leadership at the company.

Leadership is often seen as putting the carrot in front of the workers to get them to do what you want them to do. There is some merit in this sort of extrinsic reward as people file back into work the next day to earn their paycheck. However, not everyone desires bigger carrots, but rather the intrinsic desire of excelling and the chance to contribute their skills and talents to a greater cause. Therefore, motivation of employees – whether it be upper management or the lower tier of the organizational chart – requires both extrinsic and intrinsic modes of motivation.

The trick is knowing when to implement each form of motivation. That is true leadership. Some employees thrive on the bigger paycheck and cracking the production whip gets them moving quicker and with more quality toward the goal. Others need a different manner of motivation. That isn't to say they are not capable of getting more done. It is more about finding a use of different potential strengths. Not everyone will be the ideal worker who goes above and beyond, but not everyone necessarily needs to be that worker when needing to get the job done.

LEADERSHIP AND COMMITMENT

A leader is expected to be ahead of the pack, to see the marketplace where there is opportunity to take the business, a never-ending game of calculating the risks involved with product and services and resources available to perform them, and to use quantitative and qualitative measures to gauge the levels of commitment and effectiveness of such an initiative.

Resources and the bottom line are not just material items such as a stapler and pens for employees to perform the job, or black and white numbers indicating success or failure at the company. Compliments to the employees for a job well done are just as important a commodity as a ream of paper for the printer. Most meetings for manufacturing center around defects and how to minimize scrap to improve overall yield. There are very rarely meetings on goals to highlight the good things people are doing, as most KPIs (key process

indicators) center around improvement such as scrap or external escapes. And even then, it is a half-empty or half-full glass type of discussion erring mostly to the side of, "How come we couldn't get any more product out the door?" instead of, "Wow, what a record month! What did we do to achieve this and how do we keep it?"

This is not to suggest that quantitative measures are not important. Measuring parts/hour and progressive discipline schemes are essential in manufacturing for it to sustain itself as a business. But are the employees engaged? Are they mindful of their actions? Do they even care? And if not, how can we motivate them? Some ways might be to scold them, discipline them, or write them up when their numbers fall below the day's expected quota. These methods might work. But most likely not, as they can create resentment, a misperception of power within the company, a one-way flow of who is telling whom what to do.



A good leader should possess skills not only of technical ability, but also of people skills. Anyone can remember a dictionary or cite things from a technical specification, but the art of successfully conveying the why and how to meet requirements takes a certain type of leadership skill and effective communication.

QUALITY POLICY

The quality policy is like a mantra for the customer. It pertains to everyone who works at the company. It can become cliché at times. “Customer satisfaction is my job” or “Produce high-quality parts” are classic responses to an auditor. But like the platitudes of “hard work pays off” or “say what you do, do what you say,” must be repeated and ingrained to become a point of realization in all aspects of what an employee does during the day. That it isn’t only in producing parts, where the quality policy is implemented, but also taken as far as to the mindfulness of the quality of steps taken to and from the lunchroom or the mindfulness of quality in the words spoken to other employees.

ORGANIZATION ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND AUTHORITIES

Everyone wants a feeling of importance and fitting into something that is bigger than themselves. Building that feeling of importance among the team is the most important aspect of good leadership. And even though AS9100 holds top management accountable to such leadership expectations, everyone in the company must be equally aware of the impact of leadership at their level.

All companies want to promote and celebrate success. Typically, this is in the form of doing a great job, getting a raise, and possibly being promoted every few years. But sustaining a culture of positive leadership and responsibility among the employees must not be done on an every few years schedule, but a more frequent day-to-day, even minute-to-minute schedule. This sense of time is brought more to the present in which employees can feel empowered even to make changes at smaller scales knowing their impact will be greater as these small changes compound over time.

But this is hard to measure. No KPI tracks the “nice work” or “thank you” through every minute of every day. The scrap numbers and delivery performance are far easier, high level goals to track.

CONCLUSION

“All streams flow to the sea because it is lower than they are. if you want to lead people, you must learn how to follow them” — Lao Tzu

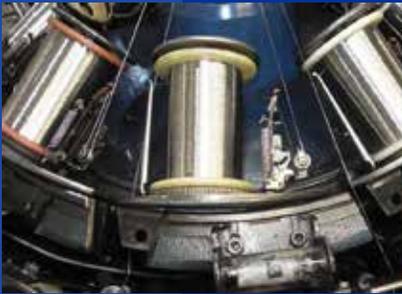
People’s emotions and behaviors are not always so clear and able to be quantitatively measured. Each person requires a special sort of attention, something that takes time and effort in a company. A good leader should possess skills not only of technical ability, but also of people skills. Anyone can remember a dictionary or cite things from a technical specification, but the art of successfully conveying the why and how to meet requirements takes a certain type of leadership skill and effective communication.

No one is born with special skills in life. We don’t sit in our cradle and infuse technical knowledge of the Gibbs free energy equation to create binary phase diagrams to be used in heat-treat practice. We learn them — just as there is potential to learn leadership skills. But recognizing that leadership is not just at the top seems to be an important step when promoting leadership throughout the company and team. Learning how people can empower one another is an important skill. ♪

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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