

January 9, 2007

Happy New Year to all of our friends, associates and clients!

As you start this new year, many of you are thinking about how to take your company to the next step. How to finally get everyone in the organization thinking about doing the best they can everyday. What a wonderful resolution – one that can surely pay you tremendous dividends in the short and long term – if done properly.

I recently read a list of obstacles – pitfalls or roadblocks – that often interfere with an organization's movement toward and realization of a quality culture. I wanted to share some of the key issues as this week's Food for Thought!

Obstacles to Establishing a Quality Culture

1. Hope for Instant Pudding – the transformation takes time and takes effort. There is no quick path to quality.
2. The supposition that solving problems, automation, gadgets, and new machinery will transform your industry.
3. Search for examples – attempting to transform to a quality culture by copying another company's procedures is likely to fail. Improvement of quality is a theory that can be transferred to any company, but only the theory can be transferred.
4. Our problems are different – everyone's problems are different, but the principles for improvement are universal.
5. Obsolescence in schools – business schools teach how to make a short-term profit rather than how to produce quality.
6. Poor teaching of statistical methods – don't use poorly trained people to teach statistical methods to your employees. Hire competent people who are leaders in profound knowledge.
7. Our quality department takes care of all of our problems of quality – in this kind of company, the wrong people are responsible for quality. Quality is the responsibility of the process operators and especially of management.
8. Our troubles lie entirely in the work force – the workers are handicapped by the system and the system is the responsibility of management.
9. False starts – the use of pieces of the quality philosophy, methodology, tools and techniques can provide deceiving results. Remember, there is no instant pudding. The transformation takes time and effort.
10. We installed quality control. – it cannot be installed. The improvement of quality requires a learning process, over time, led by management.
11. The unmanned computer – the computer is just a machine. It can collect and summarize data, but it cannot discern what kind of variation exists in a process. An understanding of variation is vital to improving quality.

12. The supposition that it is only necessary to meet specifications – specifications do not determine quality. Quality is evidenced by something that meets or exceeds the customers' expectations.
13. The fallacy of zero defects – no process is without variation. The point is to continually reduce variation, but it is not to seek the impossible. To seek results within specification limits expecting zero defects is an illusion. There is still loss, because there is always variation.
14. Inadequate testing of prototypes – a prototype is just one instance of a product or service. It takes many instances and continual improvement of the process to approach quality.
15. Anyone that comes to try to help us must understand all about our business – those who come to help you must understand how to improve systems. Together with those who understand the systems, they can enable continual process improvement of the systems .