

and delightful, followed by much applauding and congratulating. At the very end of the last scene, the head and deputy head of publicity, who had been at one another's throat for weeks, were seen improvising a dance duet.

The day went at a fast pace and was only really a taste of what might be possible, but a worthwhile reminder that imagination opens doors, that everyday communication, so often habitual and wasteful, can be fresh and spontaneous.

The experience also pointed out that the arts also involve management—not just inspiration, but a more complicated set of skills—from clarity of intention, to open-hearted exploration, to effective and committed delivery.

And that a human heart beats even in the taxman's breast.

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why can't everyone participate directly in quality improvement?

Pat Townsend

ONE OF THE BASIC PROBLEMS WITH THE EVOLUTION OF THE quality movement is the many snobs who have thrust themselves into positions as spokespeople and consultants for the movement.

By snobs, I refer to the folks who would have us believe that some people are smart enough, good enough, and dedicated enough to actually “do” quality while all others are cast into roles as onlookers and order-takers. These are the folks who advocate—implicitly or explicitly—breaking a company into “us guys who understand and do quality” and “the rest of the people.”

This bias is often introduced at the very beginning of a quality effort when the genesis question is posed. “Whom should we assign to this quality effort?” “Who can we get to volunteer to do this quality stuff?” Or, most recently, “Who can we scare into doing quality to save their career?” No matter what the stated intent, the practical effect is to split an organization into a minority who care about the future of the company and a majority who apparently don't.

In fact, the only logically defensible question with which to begin a quality effort is, “Who can we afford to exclude from this effort to improve?” The knee-jerk answer is the right one: nobody. Welcome to 100% employee involvement.

Quality, after all, is not something that is supposed to be done in addition to “real” work. It is how real work is supposed to be done. One vocabulary hint: this is not mandatory enrollment. Enrollment is simply nonvoluntary. This is how the job is done. Just like getting there on time.

If someone, at any level, objects to the idea of 100% employee involvement, she or he should be required to

consider the above question carefully and to then list the specific names of all those people to exclude—along with an explanation of why that person is being carried on the payroll if he or she is incapable of having an interesting thought or contributing in some useful way.

I am not advocating that everyone can do everything or anything. Empowerment is not freedom to do your own thing; empowerment means being able to exercise authority equal to responsibility. No more, but no less. For pragmatic purposes, empowerment most often works best at the team levels. That is why I do advocate 100% employee-involved, team-based efforts.

Teams are wonderfully self-policing. Where an individual might pursue an idea that looks good to him or her and then be refused (before or after causing damage or merely consternation somewhere else in the company). While the individual may then quit initiating ideas because he or she was allowed to invest so much wasted time, a team would most likely never start down that fruitless path. The initiator would still bring the idea up, but the flaws would be discovered during the team discussion and they would move on to another idea.

A very practical benefit that comes from structuring quality efforts around teams is that such a structure allows for natural inconsistencies that occur in any group of humans. Quite simply, not everyone gets excited at the same time. Some folks will be excited the first day the quality team meets; some will be waiting to see if this whole thing is for real and once convinced will begin to contribute. Some people might opt-out upfront, but are enrolled in a quality team anyway can, when they finally catch on, begin taking part in the team activity easily. Lastly, some of those folks who

were excited on day one will become less interested – or very busy – from time to time. Different people will carry the load at different meetings, while everyone can continue to stay connected; secure in the thought that they have a venue for any ideas they happen to have.

But why the nonvoluntary 100%? Let's say you start with volunteers – because of the popular excuses: "We want to start with the people who are really enthusiastic so we'll get this going with a real bang." or "Well, you can't force someone to participate." Let's say that Chris is a nonvolunteer because, as Chris so eloquently puts it, "I've got better things to do than go sit in a meeting with a bunch of Twinkie do-gooders."

After a few months go by – assuming that the teams have been set up well and are being supported and encouraged – Chris will notice that the team members have all made their own jobs easier, more efficient, and more satisfying while helping the company at the same time. If Chris decides that getting improvements made is a good idea, the first step that Chris must take is to say, "I was wrong a few months ago. I'm sorry I called you guys Twinkies. I would like to join a team. Please." Knowing that such verbal self-flagellation is required, Chris will most likely not bother.

If, however, Chris is assigned as a member to a team automatically, when the light finally goes on, all Chris needs to say is, "Hey, I've got an idea." Chris' teammates may hand out a little grief along the "it's about time" line, but there is no real barrier – formal or psychological – to Chris' participation.

Of course, defining a quality process structure that enrolls every person on the payroll on a quality team will be tough on the snobs who inhabit so much of the quality world. This is because of two things:

- People will find out that this quality stuff is doable at every level and that it is not nuclear physics. Some

quality managers will more deeply understand the reaction of the emperor when the little kid hollered out, "But he doesn't have any clothes on!"

- Managers, with and without quality in their titles, won't be able to micromanage any more. A 100% employee-involved team-based effort, if defined and supported anywhere near correctly, will result in so much activity that it will be impossible to maintain the old "Mother, may I?" decision sequences. The managers will have to come to grips with the concept that the personnel department hires adults and that teams can be – must be – trusted.

This is when the true value of teams will be evident. They aren't there to replace the hierarchical managers. They are there to do their own jobs so well that the manager has the time and resources to actually do his or her own job. Everybody wins.

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Townsend spent the previous dozen years giving keynote presentations and conducting workshops throughout the world. He was a member of the original team that defined the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 1987 and served as an examiner for that award for two years. His contributions to The Journal for Quality and Participation are numerous and many of them are included in his last book, Quality Is Everybody's Business (CRC Press, 1999).

His other books include: Commit to Quality (John Wiley & Sons, 1986), Quality in Action: 93 Lessons in Leadership, Participation, and Measurement (John Wiley & Sons, 1992), Five-Star Leadership: The Art and Strategy of Creating Leaders at Every Level (John Wiley & Sons, 1997), Recognition, Gratitude & Celebration (Crisp Publications, 1997), How Organizations Learn: Investigate, Identify, Institutionalize (Crisp Publications, 1999).