

Sticks and Stones and ISO

By Tannia Shamas

“Here comes the Profit Eater!” As a Quality Consultant, I prepare myself for the negative responses I generally receive when first introduced to front line employees. To them, the idea of implementing and integrating a Quality Management System into their work life is a costly annoyance, similar to our yearly duty of paying taxes. The employee who called me a “Profit Eater” was only articulating what most employees are thinking; that ISO 9001 and all that it entails, is a costly, time consuming and high maintenance, “necessary evil” that robs from the bottom line.

Little wonders that employees, and employers for that matter, believe this. Most businesses seeking an ISO registration do so only because a (large) customer demands it, or they wish to enhance their corporate profile. They never had any genuine intentions of following quality management principles beyond the minimum effort required to survive an audit and get registered. Furthermore, they question the value of surveillance audits. All too often their auditor displays little empathy for their real business issues and runs around looking for problems so they can issue a couple of non-conformances to justify their next visit. “Do we really need this?” is being questioned more and more.

Organizational changes are never well received, especially when you believe that a customer has forced your company into assimilation! Certainly, this is trite, but change is possible over time. I once heard an economist say that the metric system, now over 30 years old in Canada, will take approximately three generations before it is fully adopted. Case in point; although we buy our fuel in litres, most of us could not say how much we weigh in kilograms. In order for a Quality Management System to take hold in a company, it must have management’s complete and ongoing support.

Much of the ISO Standard places a focus on management's role in ISO 9000. Management plays a vital role in ISO 9001 by providing direction, resources, and vision. Managers must show commitment to the Quality Management System in order to set the proper tone throughout the company. The Quality Management System needs commitment and support from all levels of management, especially the highest levels, before it can be effective. The company must also survive, or pass, the audit to get the certificate. However, companies have to look past management's role and “audit survival” to reap the greatest benefits.

With employee training and a Quality Management System that is relevant to the company, and therefore easily understood and maintained, a company can realize increased productivity, improvement and control of processes, consistency in performance, and less scrap and rework. Customer satisfaction increases as because goals and objectives take the customer needs into account. Customer needs are better

understood as customer feedback is sought, received and analyzed. Goals and objectives are adjusted based on the information and the organization becomes more customer-driven. As goals focus on the customer, the company spends less time focusing on individual goals of departments and more time working together to meet customer needs.

All of this leads to financial rewards, your reward for your hard work and investment in the Quality Management System. Management and employees can work with enthusiasm and optimism, knowing that your company will be significantly improved by implementing ISO 9001. In the end, all employees will be contributing to the future success and profitability of the company.