

Quality Management—The Impact on Production

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Many businesses have been frightened by the concept of quality. This is totally unnecessary. There is nothing mystical, only the need for understanding, commitment and a common sense approach. The common sense and understanding comes from the acceptance that for quality management to be successful, every part of the company work together. It is especially important that sales/marketing and production work in harmony and with a commitment towards meeting the needs of the customer.

Far too many of the companies I encounter are production-led, thus finding it difficult to establish a sound basis in the current competitive market place. Equally there are many companies who are approaching the future on the basis of sales-led promotions thinking that this is marketing. Such approaches create compartmentalized companies with a narrow-minded approach to quality management.

Quality Management is about:

- a) Knowing what the customer wants
- b) Getting the best performance throughout the company.
- c) Doing things simply but effectively
- d) Reducing errors, waste
- e) Developing a competitive approach, there is nothing wrong in being best
- f) Teamwork
- g) Good communications
- h) Recognizing good work
- i) Aiming for continual improvement (KAIZEN)

KAIZEN is the Japanese concept of improvement, continual improvement in every aspect of life. In the work place, continual improvement involves everyone—managers and workers alike. KAIZEN is a way of life in Japan. It is the key to Japan's competitive success, and whilst in our industry we are unlikely to be threatened by the Japanese, we are vulnerable to the threat of many other competitors, any one of whom may just adopt the philosophy of continual improvement leading to the all important competitive edge being gained.

It must be accepted that errors do occur, errors in one part of the business create problems elsewhere. Errors multiply, errors are costly. Everyone at every stage must work to reduce and eliminate errors. In production, errors may take different lengths of time to appear. In propagation, wrongly handled or prepared cuttings will soon be showing signs of not rooting. It could however be an evergreen cutting which may sit for many weeks or months before it finally fails. Propagators often put the failure down to a quirk of the plant, it could of course be poor quality management. Why not set your self the task of improving your percentage take by $x\%$ and using a quality management approach to initiate the improvement?

Badly collected or stored budwood will inevitably lead to lower bud takes. There may be one team preparing budwood one team budding and yet another tying, each one interacting with the other and yet each can seriously affect the end result.

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It is clearly evident that each team should interact with the other to set their requirements and establish the all-important customer/supplier relationship

At the end of any chain is the external customer. You must meet their needs in terms of quality, which of course means more than just delivering a good or bad plant. It also means getting it to them when they want it at a price they are prepared to pay—and you are prepared to accept—in the condition they expect. Failing on any of these means you have a dissatisfied customer who might easily place the next order elsewhere

The other point to remember is, who usually “gets it in the neck” if a bad quality product has been delivered. Maybe the lorry driver, who had nothing to do with assembling the order. It often also gets to the point of an irate call to the salesman who again probably didn’t lift the order. Everyone absolves themselves of responsibility. Quality management means that everyone accepts responsibility and works hard to ensure these errors don’t occur in the first place

As a consultant, I very often ask staff who are working on a crop which customer will be taking delivery of the plants. Of course this is very unfair because unless it is contract grown the customer may be unknown. But I would expect them to know what market sector the crop is aimed at. But the response I often get is a vague, blank, don’t know, don’t care I’m just told to weed/prune/space etc. Again the shedding of responsibility. Quality management must encourage the acceptance of responsibility but to be strongly assisted by supportive tiers of management communications. The work force must know what is expected of them. They more importantly must know what the customer expects. Senior staff must train and educate the work force into knowing what is good enough to go out of the gate and perhaps more importantly what can’t go out.

In the real world after having set standards, all too often I have encountered situations where staff are put under pressure to send plants out which do not conform to them. Sales staff oversell, or are struggling to achieve budgets, they don’t like to say no. You have all, I am sure, met these situations but by developing sound communications the element of destroying workers confidence can be overcome. I was recently at a nursery where a team were caning and tying a crop. It was also very weedy. The message from the manager was to complete the caning and tying by a set time. The workers knew that while they were working through the crop they should pull out weeds. However, they found that the weeding was slowing the job down dramatically. As they thought the key job was caning and tying they started to weed less thoroughly and pick up speed. It was clear though that the crop again would need to be gone through in about 10 days to be weeded. Quite clearly the workers were unhappy because they felt they were only doing half the job and management were concerned that they weren’t getting through the crop quickly enough. A case of poor communications from both parties because both were unaware of the others concerns. But a classic case for improving for the future

Documented work procedures would help to eliminate such discrepancies that often occur. Such procedures also have to be audited to ensure the tasks are being done in accordance with the documented system. It may be possible to improve it at this stage.

Teamwork is essential for problem solving and improving for the future. It develops greater satisfaction, a more enlightened approach, lateral thinking,

better understanding between departments and a greater enthusiasm to implement new approaches.

Many companies are affected by Total Quality Paralysis. Not knowing where to begin, they never get started. It must be approached from the top down and the base up. Understanding and commitment are vital pre-requisites. You must then implement gradually, carefully, constantly building, measuring and improving.

Quality Management has a profound impact on production! Why keep on the treadmill of doing more and more to maintain the same position. Use quality management to do the same and achieve more (or less to achieve the same.) But for all you competitive animals I'm sure you want to go forward. My advice is do it the best way do it the quality way.