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Building and Keeping Up Quality

THE QUALITY OF PEOPLE and of the goods they make and the services they perform concerns everyone. Every hour of every day we are required to trust people, and we must be able to rely upon the goodness of the articles we buy and use.

When we say that a person or an article has quality we mean that he or it has a degree of excellence that makes the person or the article reliable.

While there are many definitions of excellence, all of them include the idea of "first-rate". Striving toward the first-rate has created most of the greatness in men and women in all history.

The making of goods by machinery has not eliminated the human being as a factor in good quality output. Every job is important, whatever its rank may be on the scale of job classification, and it must measure up to certain quality standards. The most elegant railway train in the world, with all its electronic devices, could not run if it were not for the "gandy dancer", the man who maintains the road-bed and the rails at the standard required for safe and smooth riding.

Quality is measured by the service an article gives in the use for which it was designed.

It is impossible to value too highly the good effect on all processes within a factory of upgrading quality. On the other hand, the effect of downgrading quality will be felt adversely by the selling branch of the firm. The volume of work will fall off to the disadvantage of employees, and the firm's income will decrease.

The value of a person's judgment or opinion about quality is set and limited by the extent of his acquaintance with the best standards. Knowledge of these must be sought continually. In the world of quality there is no standing still, but motion within a framework of stability. Discontent with things as they are is to some people a nagging nuisance, giving them nothing except subjects to grouch about; creative discontent is a restlessness of mind that is searching for new and better ways of doing things.

The law prescribes the standards to be met by certain goods; the standards of some others are set forth in codes of ethics written by their makers. There is a

general movement of business away from such unethical principles as "Let the buyer beware".

Beyond the law and the codes there is a demand by purchasers and a desire by workmen for good craftsmanship in machine-made as well as in hand-crafted goods. Prince Philip said in an address to the Royal College of Art: "There is no reason why we should be palmed off with second-rate stuff on the excuse that it is machine-made."

The great difference between the craft skill of former days and that of today is this: the old time workman shaping a physical substance like wood, clay or metal had the feel of it in his finger-tips, whereas today he controls a mechanical process. They were workers of excellence who carved the procession of youths and maidens on the Parthenon in Athens. They were as careful as though the figures were to be viewed at eye-level and not from forty feet below. The quality machine worker of today is as careful with his gauges and switches as the stone workers were with their chisels and hammers.

What is quality?

Skill, knowledge and judgment enter into quality work, as do energy and persevering diligence. One does one's best, and is content, though he knows that it is far from the best that might be done. He is interested in doing the job well for its own sake.

One must have an ideal, but it is a good practice while keeping an eye on that ideal, to work toward it by doing what is within one's power to do now, and to make a habit of doing well what has to be done.

John D. McLellan, B.A.Sc., of Northeastern University, said in his Alexander Hamilton Institute volume in the Modern Business series: "For an employee to get recognition for his work in a plant, he must do more than meet the expected requirements. He must strive for exceptional performance."

Careful craftsmanship shows the honest delight of a workman in his work. It gives him a feeling of personal importance. It prompts him to do habitually work that has the stamp of authenticity. Michelangelo had never

seen an angel, and Della Robbia had never seen a cherub, and yet the quality of their sculptures convinces us that there are angels and cherubs.

When an honest person finds out what is fitting and needed, and uses his skill to supply it, he is on the right road to excellence.

It is a piece of self-love to imagine that one has already attained to what is best. Having the desire to achieve excellence, the next thing to do is to act toward winning it.

This effort is not always successful on easy terms. It takes time to bring ability to full growth as excellence. Even as he touches the fringe of excellence, the ambitious person is getting ready for the better work he will do tomorrow. He is acquiring new knowledge, looking ahead, planning his course, learning thoroughly by practice, and cultivating the desire and the will-power to add to his proficiency.

If you wish to be thought good at anything the shortest and safest and most certain way is to try to make yourself really good at it. There is a light-hearted example in the Gilbert and Sullivan play *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Sir Joseph Porter got to be First Lord of the Admiralty by doing well every task in his varied life: copying letters, cleaning windows, sweeping the floor, and polishing the handle of the big front door.

Everyone needs to cultivate his feeling for good quality, and to show it in his work. A person who does not know of the existence of excellence is in a bad way, but not nearly so bad as that of a person who knows that there is such a thing as excellence but makes no effort toward it.

Quality in business

The problem faced by a manufacturer is how to produce good quality merchandise, demanded by customers, at a reasonable price which provides profits for shareholders. A manufacturer has many points to consider in setting a quality standard for the goods he produces. He needs to determine the grade of raw material to be used, the efficiency of his machines, the skill of his workers, and the fitness of the design of his product.

The grade of quality must be measured against cost, but the manufacturer cannot compromise with the required standard of quality and maintain his good reputation or his share of the market.

Getting the quality right is important to the worker at the bench. Good quality is essential to sales volume brought about by repeat orders, and repeat orders are the backbone of most businesses. Therefore good quality on the production line is an assurance of continued steady work for the factory hands.

These factors enter into judgment of quality: good materials, good design, engineering accuracy, and superior workmanship. To judge whether a product is of the best quality the purchaser needs to learn whether it gives the service it is supposed to give, and whether it will last long enough to justify the price he paid for it.

During the past twenty years there has been a growing practice among manufacturers to pay attention to these points, to establish standards, and to inform customers what these standards are. Look at the merchandise spread before customers, from ball-point pens to automobiles, and you will see that claims to good quality are universal selling points.

There are, roughly, four kinds of groups interested in establishing, defining and checking quality: manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers who set their own standards; trade associations which formulate codes of ethics and standards for their members; government departments which check and test certain sorts of commodities, and consumer groups which compare notes on the performance in use of various articles from heavy household equipment to packaged cereals.

In the factory, the manager or the foreman is responsible for the quality of goods produced by workers under his supervision. Besides being the principal actor in his own life drama, a manager is also director of the performance of others. He has to know his workers and their roles; he has to allow them to play their parts, directing their effort but not infringing their individuality.

The foreman has the undoubted responsibility to see that work is done properly so as to maintain the quality of the goods produced, in accord with standards set by the executive. He will try to inspire a sense of commitment to quality in workers. They cannot be made quality conscious by an occasional speech about doing good work. Continuous education is necessary, and acquaintanceship with models of the best.

At the very base of quality production is the desire for excellence, and this needs to be given life by the man in charge. A person will work with his hands in order to live, but he will put his heart into his work when he is striving toward excellence.

What is this excellence, and how high is the quality that is desired? Any foreman or manager who wishes his staff to make an effort toward quality output must state his purpose and his requirements clearly, and back up his statement with facts and examples. His objectives need to be unmistakably defined. Quality standards locked up in a supervisor's mind have no significance or usefulness.

Motivation

The foreman seeking to see his workers reach the peak of their best performance should seek and find out what triggers them to try.

Great men have an all-consuming passion for their work. They delight in their talent and pursue it with restless energy and patient thoroughness. Pride of achievement is their powerful incentive.

It is essential for a worker to have an aim, and it needs to be something specific, concrete and definite. This requires a manager to get to know his people, because what motivates one person will leave another cold. Individuals respond to different stimuli.

There is one factor that seems common to most workers: the admiration that is given to a piece of work well done. The ordinary business of making things goes hand in hand with the instinct to make them beautiful. A cabinet-maker will run his hand lovingly over a smooth joint; a machinist will pat almost affectionately the axle and socket he has machined to a fine tolerance; the accountant will purr over the last line in a huge array of figures where the balance shows that his calculations were correct.

The great achievements of men of science, artists and writers have been sparked by a desire to improve. Every accomplishment is first of all an idea, and every visible successful act is primarily an invisible thought. If these thoughts are of making or doing things better they will develop into ideas and commendable performance.

Incentive wages should convey the idea that they are a dividend made possible by increased production of good quality goods, rather than a speed-up device. The desire for recognition of work well done is not satisfied by an envelope containing a cheque. When a surgeon is called upon to perform a difficult operation, and he performs it with consummate skill, it would be the plainest nonsense to say that his only motive is the fee.

Inspiring employee enthusiasm

Managers are giving serious attention to the making of jobs more attractive and interesting. Good quality work has been seen to be the rule where workers have a satisfying social relationship and comfortable working conditions in the office or work-room. One of the greatest assets any human being can possess is a sense of satisfaction with his environment.

In judging whether a person did his best in a job, attention must be given to the circumstances under which he worked. A disorderly workplace, for example, whether office, factory or kitchen, is likely to produce poor quality work. A worker's reaction to his surroundings reflects itself in the kind of work he turns out.

Goodwill and loyalty are essential characteristics of work people who are required to do quality work. Business that keeps a manager from giving his workers the recognition that their egos need is undermining any effort toward encouraging growth of these valuable assets.

Some people in authority take for granted that if they do not complain, their workers will know that everything is fine. This is a mistake. Most people, though they do not seek lavish praise, wish to be reassured as to their continued ability. Feedback of commendation and encouragement is important in promoting the search for excellence.

Need it be said that it is a mistake to tell an employee only about his defects? A boss who smothers his people under criticism is weakening his own position. He must recognize the fact that all people make errors. As Shakespeare wrote in a sonnet: "Roses have

thorns, and silver fountains mud . . . All men make faults." The manager's duty is to advise and counsel so that blunders do not recur.

In his effort to be positive rather than negative he will devise ways of providing opportunities for his workers to display their initiative and their expertness. Many a person who has become stale on a job has been freshened by discovery of the possibilities in his work for creative improvement.

From the buying side

The buying public will benefit when it learns to form its own judgment of what is good.

The consumer who buys carelessly, ignoring quality, is lowering his level of living. As N. E. Brown says in *Consumer Education* (Macmillan Co. of Canada, 1964): "When he wastes a dollar in poor buymanship he deprives himself of other products that he might have enjoyed if he had purchased with greater wisdom."

Knowing what is bad, what is shoddy, is a first step: the second is to make known what you consider to be good quality. If a purchaser does not make clear to a seller what quality goods he desires he cannot hold the seller responsible for a shortfall in quality.

For evidence of the manufacturers' awareness of quality standards one need only notice the increasing number of labels and tags that carry concrete information about material and workmanship. The consumer will learn much about the suitability of the goods to his needs by reading the label, including the small type.

There is no need to wait for experience in order to become a wise purchaser. Consumer education is available in books, magazines, and in night classes. The Consumers' Association of Canada, Ottawa, a non-profit organization, reports through its bulletin, *Canadian Consumer*, on misleading advertising, the degree to which manufacturers live up to the virtues they claim for their goods, and the relative values, in terms of service and price, given by various brands of goods. There are magazines which provide information on many consumer commodities, with comparisons based upon tests made of competing brands.

The wise consumer wishes to get his money's worth, and in that quest he will follow some simple procedures. The first step toward buying quality goods is to plan your shopping. Make a list of what you need and want, including the things that you expect your purchase to do for you. Consult a consumer test publication and compare models.

Consider both price and quality. The shrewd buyer knows that the only bargain is an article that fills a need. Just because something is on sale at a low price does not justify one in buying it. The questions to ask are these: Has this article the capacity to fill my need? Has it the features that make it a quality buy for me in my present circumstances and in view of my needs?

To find out what the measure of worth is, answer further questions: What do I want it to do? How long will it last? How efficient is it? How easily does it

operate? Are repairs easy to obtain? How much does it cost? What is the cost of operating it?

Enemies of quality

There are a dozen things that influence quality harmfully, both quality in production and quality in buying. Some of them are: haste, carelessness, disinterest, inattention, ignorance, poor training, and lack of pride.

If an article is faulty, it may be due to any of several causes. Enough time was not taken to manufacture it carefully; not enough testing was done to find out how the article would perform in use; inferior material was used; workmanship was not good.

Some people are content to settle for just passable performance or just good enough merchandise. They are satisfied with mediocrity, and that is not within striking distance of excellence.

The man is not only turning out inferior merchandise, but is inflicting on himself a shoddy life, who scamps his work to the point where he lets its quality sink to the level below which his supervisors will not let it fall.

It is distressing to watch a person with little knowledge or skill trying to handle a job, but it is truly pitiful to see a person who is gifted with skill and knowledge doing a slovenly job through carelessness, lack of pride or disinterest.

"Will it pass?" is a low class standard to apply to a piece of work, far removed from the superior workman's touchstone: "Is it good?"

No spirited mind is satisfied with merely "getting by". It reaches out for excellence. It combines faultless workmanship and the professional spirit to produce something that has good quality and gives the crowning feeling of satisfaction.

Seeking perfection

Even if perfection is not reached, working toward it will result in a better product than if one is content to continue on an easy level.

A dream of future perfection should not blind us to the desirability of doing the best we can now. Reaching for the best possible under the present circumstances is a high ideal.

Nobody should expect to be perfect, or be unduly troubled by the fact that he is not. The dedicated absolutist is like a person who will love nothing but perfection, who does not believe in the existence in human life of anything perfect, and who quarrels with the world for not containing perfection.

The search for perfection should not become overstrained. Too much painstaking is blamable, just as well as too little. One has to know when to quit. Some artists keep touching up their paintings, so that in the end they remain "sketches". As critics said of Ingres's painting of Oedipus in the Louvre: "The young Greek is so carefully drawn, so smoothly modelled, so tire-

somely drawn and modelled, that it cannot arouse the enthusiasm such perfection otherwise might."

There are some jobs in which good quality consists in ability to perform a function: elegance and polish are not necessary. An old Scottish proverb says: "What need to make the bridge much wider than the road?"

Quality in one's life

The Criminal Code and the Ten Commandments are effective in compelling behaviour that does not transgress a neighbour's rights, but these are only the beginning of his development to a person seeking to build quality into his life.

Quality in living is not a newly-sought way of life. Several thousand years ago the sacred book of Egypt pictured moral perfection. The soul pleading before Osiris and the celestial jury said: "I have told no lies, committed no frauds, promoted no strife, caused no one to weep, made no fraudulent gains; I have sown joy and not sorrow, given food to the hungry and clothed the naked."

Quality living does not consist merely in not doing wrong. There are people in every age who stand out head and shoulders above others. They are people who have something to do and do it well.

"Something to do" is a key phrase in quality living — something to do, the doing of which gives self-fulfilment, the satisfaction of achievement, the pleasure of using one's head and hands creatively for the advantage or welfare of society. "Something to do" is one of the greatest aids toward excellence, because the feeling of having something to do engenders and feeds the desire to do it well.

Whatever a person's position in society, executive or labourer, politician or voter, he has a duty in a world that rides uneasily on the surface of chaos. There was service to be given even in the Celestial City toward which John Bunyan's pilgrim made his way.

Quality and excellence

There is nothing quaint and old-world about love of quality and the desire for excellence. Everyone has admiration for things well done, and everyone, at some time, has dreamed of doing some excellent thing.

Quality performance is not to be kept for great occasions. Small matters provide the training ground for excellence. A peasant basket ornamented with a garland of coloured straw roses is as important in its place as a fresco on a palace wall.

Everyone who tackles it finds the search for quality in the work he does a mind-satisfying and life-broadening endeavour. His reward is not necessarily money or public acclaim. Self-respect and the respect of others, and the knowledge of having done something well are quite enough. As Ruskin put it: "The delight of the First Great Artificer when He looked upon His handiwork and 'saw that it was very good.'"