

WHO DO WE NEED TO BE TO ACHIEVE CHANGE?

Communication and salesmanship should be at the heart of quality, says Ryan Renard CQP MCQI, SMS and QMS Manager at Ontic Engineering and Manufacturing



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As the quality profession begins a shift in aerospace, the premise being that ‘quality management’ implies only one department or a single person managing all of quality is undergoing change.

There is a misconception that quality sells itself based on risk aversion, but I believe we should also focus on selling quality as risk-enabling. For example, if a business wants to grow, acquire new products or enter a new field, then established quality enables a boundary for control. This minimises, and potentially mitigates, increased risk; bringing the unknown into the known.

As a profession, we tend towards specialising in detail, focusing on differences rather than similarities to align compliance. This means being a salesperson is anathema to what we typically find enjoyable at work.

The truth is, we are all salespeople to some degree. Every time we communicate, we ‘sell’ our message – and others can choose to ‘buy’ it, or not! This presupposes two key skills: communication and salesmanship.

Communication

How often has an important message been lost in poorly chosen words, audience, context, content or framing? How often have we found ourselves frustrated at not being listened to or understood?

We are all responsible for ensuring others understand us. A core element of communication lies in establishing rapport with whom we are communicating – a lack of this generates resistance.

As quality professionals, we don’t need to know everything. However, we do need to know enough to facilitate change and compliance, by asking the right questions and guiding people to achieve compliant and safe answers. If we have all the answers, people become reliant, delegating

or relinquishing their own responsibility.

We also need to acknowledge limitations; no single person can know as much as everyone in a room. Quality is heavily reliant on a creative collaboration culture.

When we advocate for quality, we do so for safety and the end user. Standards and regulations are not written to sell, inspire or encourage – they are to inform, orientated towards how, not why. They are not even orientated towards quality professionals; we still need to learn their intention, language and means of compliance. We are trainers, mentors and leaders, who represent quality and the end user. Through collaboration, we can bring people together to achieve more than it could alone, facilitating positive change and growth. Remember: if quality were easy, we would not need standards, regulations or quality professionals.

How should we communicate?

When presenting information, we can use four core representative systems: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and auditory digital. For example, visual people favour graphs and colourful posters; auditory people prefer speaking; kinesthetic would rather have something more interactive; and auditory digital people like data. In their book *Made to stick*, Chip and Dan Heath proposed the ‘SUCCES’ model, making messages easier to remember. The key points are:

- **Simple:** keep information simple, and anchor the message in something people already know;
- **Unexpected:** use information that grabs attention. Use ‘open loops’ or ‘gaps in knowledge’ to draw people in;
- **Concrete:** make it tangible and meaningful;
- **Credible:** provide evidence of your information or data;

- **Emotional:** transform something abstract and analytical to reach the individual;
- **Stories:** these have power to engage and inspire, allowing people to empathise. Associating with this direct experience is how we learn.

When messages are simple, they are easier to remember. We also benefit from deepening our own knowledge while making messages more communicable.

Salesmanship

If we have established rapport, as well as suitable methods of communication, we can discuss the framing of our message. We need everyone to buy into quality. If one person is resistant, this can ripple throughout the business.

To truly sell, we need to focus on benefits. Many salesmen focus on features (what quality has), advantages (what you will get by following quality), or both. Benefits are what value we have as a result of following quality – perhaps an improved relationship with our customer, meaning preferential partnerships for new work or improving safety in industry.

What are the benefits of quality within your organisation and business? How can you shift your communication from features and advantages to benefits?

How quality is perceived

Communication and salesmanship are particularly important when it comes to the perception of a quality department or function as it drives interaction, collaboration and behaviour. The management system team within Ontic has created a vision to define this: ‘Removing the perception of quality as an obstacle.’

What does this mean? Interactions with quality can sometimes be perceived as negative. People see questions and actions as criticising them, rather than the system. By removing the stigma of quality we can facilitate the learning, development and conscious ownership of quality responsibility at all levels of the business.

We generated the mission: ‘Empowering the business to develop industry-leading safety and quality practices.’ This means quality acts as a conduit for each department to get what it needs, even though it may not be what it wants.

From here, we derived three core values:

- open-minded – seeking multiple outcomes, approaches and perspectives;

- advocate – empowering others to value quality, be recognised, rewarded and trained;
- impartial – mitigating biases, preconceived expectations or opinions from influencing outcomes.

The latter can be particularly difficult when we often perceive non-compliance as negligence, or a lack of common sense.

What is the aim of quality?

Our goal is to make industries as safe as possible through good practices and consistent, positive behaviours – the result of which is to make our departments obsolete. Our greatest achievements will come when we are no longer needed.

Systems are continually evolving to meet ongoing shifts in industrial environments, cultures, technology and knowledge. Companies are only as good as their weakest processes. As we improve our weakest link, another becomes weak by comparison, requiring continual improvement.

Important areas on which to start

1. Personal perception

We must be beyond reproach, accepting responsibility when we are wrong and setting an example for others to follow. Our message needs to be authentic and congruent. We cannot expect more of others than ourselves.

2. Training

If quality is everyone’s responsibility, what efforts are made to upskill, train and develop competence in quality throughout the business? Where are the knowledge gaps in your business?

3. Why

What is the why of the business? Do people within the organisation have the awareness and knowledge of why quality is important?

Conclusion

Quality compliance is not inherent or implicit; we need to inspire and lead people to follow quality by choice. We can achieve this by effective communication and skilled salesmanship. Culture is created by inspiration and the clear distinction of vision, mission and values. Ownership is created by conscious acceptance of responsibility.

What small change can you make to start the development of your communication and salesmanship?

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