

Knowledge

Why trust and respect enable success

This year, the CQI's World Quality Day theme celebrates trust in a world of change. **Susannah Clarke** explains why quality professionals need to build an environment of trust in their organisations

Anyone who has ever been involved in quality improvement will recognise the need for trust. It is an essential ingredient to generate productive employees and engaged stakeholders. A productive employee is someone that feels safe – safe enough to experiment and challenge – which is exactly what is required in all working environments. This feeling of safety is also imperative for the

quality professional focused on step change improvement and innovation. An engaged stakeholder will provide valuable support to enable results through change, quality improvement and transformation.

When working with people to change their thinking and/or the work they do, from their current position to where they need to be in the future, it is how those people feel about it (see bottom part of Figure 1) that has the most influence over the success of the quality initiative,

change or improvement.

Trust has a close partner in the form of respect; they are two sides of the same coin. When these go hand in hand, respect shifts from being a behaviour to becoming a deeper feeling. The greatest respect comes when people do:

- Value you for who you are;
- Trust what you say and how you behave;
- Trust how you will treat them and others;
- Believe you are honest;
- Feel confident in what to expect in terms of your attitude and beliefs.

What does respect involve? Respect is like a baton passed on to someone who then passes it back. To gain respect, the feelings, needs, wants, ideas, fears, thoughts and preferences of others must be considered first. It's about modelling desired behaviours.

In the workplace, there are leaders who use power and/or fear to command respect. But does that work? Can respect be commanded? Is that a sustainable long-term strategy?

Sometimes it is easy to forget in the heat of the moment, or when looking for a new behaviour strategy to make a change, how that behaviour will be interpreted and what impact it will have.

Witnessing poor behaviour in others, particularly from a colleague or leader, makes others feel uncomfortable because trust gets eroded and respect is lost. People who witness this style of behaviour stop



Figure 1: Based on research by Jack Gibb

“When quality professionals are trusted and respected, they earn the voluntary cooperation of others”



trusting the colleague or leader concerned, and as their trust diminishes, so does their respect.

When quality professionals are trusted and respected, they earn the voluntary cooperation of others, people want to work with them and be involved with what they are doing. The actions of quality professionals, their words and behaviours will enable them to build or lose the trust of others, and this is a critical component to their success.

To be successful in the workplace, trust is required in several relationships:

- Peer to peer;
- Direct report to manager;
- Worker to senior leader;
- Customer to employee;
- Supplier to customer.

Some people may only have to think about one or two of these levels in their daily work, but others may have to build respectful relationships at every level.

Why else is respect important? A theory suggests that the notion of respect dates to a time when mankind lived in tribes. As the tribe roamed, hunted and looked after its members, those who weren't respected could be left behind in the wilderness, excluded from a share of the food, left out because they were considered to have no worth or value to the tribe.

It's no different today. Every quality professional, indeed any professional, needs to build trust and respect because when a working culture is founded on trust, loyalty is engendered. Upstream, the benefits of this approach mean that:

- Businesses are more likely to retain their customers;
- Suppliers will give of their best;
- Talent retention is improved;
- Morale will improve;
- People will be more motivated to do their best.

Trust and respect are the glue that holds relationships together. When they exist, so does integrity, and where integrity exists for the skilled and dedicated quality professional, success also resides.

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