

Five Signs

BY MICHAEL L. PAQUIN

You have a QMS and you have policies, but does your staff know that?

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE a fabricator to appreciate the humor of the widely popular Blue Collar Comedy group but it doesn't hurt. Jeff Foxworthy is famous for his delivery that begins, "You might be a red neck if..." And Bill Engvall's slogan, "Here's your sign," has made him famous as well. Both approaches illustrate that humor is often grounded in things that are pretty close to reality. This article is about five humorous signs that might show that your QMS management team has been a little less effective than it could be.

- ▶ You have a quality policy but nobody knows what it is or what it means, even though you have it posted by the time clock and on the lunch room wall.

You might improve as a management team if you explained to your organization what your quality policy means to you, the company, and the bottom line. There is always the possibility of your customers going elsewhere or even having to close your doors if customers cannot see the underlying quality in the products and services you provide. During your next internal audit, why not survey those interviewed to see if they understand the real reason you and the company adhere to your policies?

- ▶ Somebody asks you how you have improved the quality of your product and business within the last year and you cannot show them to two decimal places how good a job you have done.

You might improve as a management team if you set some SMART (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely) goals. Your accounting department keeps track of money that moves both in and out of your company to the second decimal place. Why can't you do that for your QMS, your customer satisfaction, the performance of your subcontractors, or the cost of the "hidden factory"? This last term may sound strange, but the hidden factory is a quality concept focusing on wasteful processes that lead to increased production costs and decreased profits. The July 2011 "Quality Corner" focused on the idea of this topic for setting simple goals to reduce the effect of overlooked activities that cost your company time and money. You can find this article at www.modernsteel.com/qualitycorner.

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- ▶ You meet with your management team only once a year to review your company or department's goals, processes, and performance.

You might improve as a management team if you took more than just an annual snapshot. Why not take a few more throughout the year and piece those together to get a more panoramic view? Trying to understand a company or department with its many interrelated processes is almost impossible if you only provide yourself one view during the year that is filled with other opportunities.

- ▶ Your staff doesn't know where to find your quality manual, which looks like it has never been opened and doesn't have a single dog-eared page.

You might improve as a management team if you revised your current document to explain how one does a process and not just what to do. Procedures should be thought of as a map for improving quality and just like a good map, they should be able to help you navigate around the pitfalls of the past and control how you go forward into the future. Consider posting an electronic version of your quality manual to a local server or intranet, where all staff can easily access it. For your staff in the shop put a printed copy in the lunch room or production manager's office. Also, consider opening the quality manual every time someone has a question, just to make sure the "how" is explained in the manual. If it isn't in the manual then make sure it gets added so it is there for next time and so that when customers read your manual they can see the extensive level of quality you provide to them.

- ▶ You don't have accurate records of what your procedures have produced.

You might improve as a management team if you collect data documenting the results of your processes. In the heat of a job or fire drill, we are easily tempted to think, "I'll never forget this job," but then the next job comes along. Records are the diaries and the journals of what we have found along the procedure path, and their results will show if it is actually working or needs to be re-evaluated. Be sure that you share your findings with your staff, both for their benefit and possible input. That way they may begin to understand "it's not just paperwork," but that it actually helps improve the business. Finally, these items can help you make more informed management decisions about how to improve, and doing better pays better.

Don't wait until somebody comes along and says, "Here's your sign," or until some auditor says, "Here's your CAR." Watch for signs that there is a disconnect between your QMS, your management team and your staff. Reestablish that connection, and in the words of Larry the Cable Guy, another member of the Blue Collar Comedy group, just "Git-R-Done."

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