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THREE MYTHS ABOUT QUALITY

RESEARCH and observation (my two favorite tools) have revealed three major objections to efforts to increase quality, especially in businesses. One or more of these usually show up as an instant reaction when the subject comes up. Remember back in chapter one, where I asked you to make a note of your reaction when you read that this book was about quality? See if it was one of these.

1. Quality is more expensive than can be justified by the return.

The assumption that quality is an unjustifiable expense belongs in the category of urban myth. There is a huge difference between utilizing resources wisely and wasting money. When stories circulate about how a business failed because its managers priced their products out of the market by making them better than necessary, they are just stories. General contractors and other manufacturers are often the subjects of these stories. The truth behind any failure lies in not enough quality, not too much. Quality of marketing, quality of supervision, quality of customer service, quality of financial planning – some aspect or aspects of quality were low somewhere in the business, and brought it down.

It doesn't matter how high your quality is, or how well your business is doing: there is room for improvement, and reason for it.

First, a higher-quality product does not cost much more to produce than a lower-quality product. The cost of materials may be a bit higher, and the cost of labor might be a bit higher for its greater skill, but greater skill brings greater efficiency and less waste, and the higher cost of materials is a small percentage of overall costs.

Second, higher quality can be sold for more. People want the right apples. One problem that afflicts businesses is that the executives get greedy, and actually do price themselves out of their market. They have a product that is ten percent better than the next, and costs ten percent more to produce, but they charge twenty-five percent more. These businessmen don't fail because they made their product better than necessary. They fail because their potential customers chose not to be ripped off.

The costs versus benefits of quality will be a recurring theme in this book, and every instance will help to torpedo this mythical but widely-held belief.

2. Quality is too difficult to achieve and maintain.

Oh, this is so true – if you don't know how. There's no question, maintaining quality can be a problem. Getting a number of people all to work together with minimum errors and maximum understanding of what to do and how to do it, yes, that can be a problem. Speeches, discussions, begging, bribing, threatening, rewarding, training, and other motivations have inconsistent results, sometimes as negative as they are positive. Frustration and discouragement dog the small business owner or manager every day.

The principles of quality in this book automatically solve this problem. That's why I wrote it. *It turns out that quality is neither difficult to achieve nor difficult to maintain. And in fact, when you do the first correctly, the second follows naturally.* These remarkable statements come from personal experience, proven time and again. I understand, they cannot be taken on faith. But at least unstick yourself from any idea that they are impossible.

3. We already produce high quality.

This objection is probably the greatest obstacle to increasing the quality of his business, including the quality of his product, that any small business owner or manager will ever encounter. Logic can overcome the ideas of difficulty or expense, but this one, this

one has nothing to do with logic. This is an idea, a conceived notion, a mindset. And the darnedest thing about it is that it is absolutely true – in the mind of the person thinking it. It is hard to argue against truth.

An accounting firm, a landscaping company, a computer repairman, an insurance broker, a boutique, whatever your business is: if it's doing fine, why change it? You have as much business as you can handle, and have new customers arriving regularly. Clearly, the level of quality you are producing is high enough to keep the customers happy.

Perhaps your business is as big as you want it to be. Fine. Many businessmen reach a comfort level, and don't want to face the concerns that come with growth. Hiring and training employees is a hassle, and there are all those benefits and payroll problems, and then you need a bigger workplace, and more computers, and it goes on and on. This book may not be particularly helpful to you.

I am writing this for businesspeople who DO want to expand their business, who DO want more sales and more profit and all the rewards of growth. Who may even want to retire someday, in more than mere comfort. Yes, your business may be doing just fine, and you see a bright future. Wouldn't you like to see an even brighter future, and not so distant?

It doesn't matter how high your quality is already, or how well your business is doing: there is room for improvement, and reason for it. Especially when the improvement isn't difficult, and doesn't cost much.

The biggest reason this objection is a myth is because the phrase "We already produce high quality" is like a student saying he is already getting a B+. Why try for an A? Except it is probably harder for a student to move from a B+ to an A than it is for a business to rise to the next quality echelon.