QUALITY LEADERSHIP: *Houston, we have an [image] problem!*

The pace of change in the quality profession is snail-like even though we are quick to offer black and white responses in our black and white world. Why are we so slow in our desire to be more *relevant* to the needs of the *business*?   I have always been in the quality profession and as I grew in my formal authority and my ability to influence, I stood strongly that quality is a "business partner" to the enterprise and can (must!) add value to the bottom-line. A quality professional can actively help the business make money and cut costs while NOT compromising their primary job of protecting the customer. It's not an "either - or" but an "and" when it comes to engagement and decision making of the quality professional. Yet, the quality profession struggles to be relevant, *business* relevant.

THE NEED FOR RELEVANCY. One of the biggest impediments to quality relevancy is business acumen. The quality professional must develop the ability to look at the results *beyond* the data and treat the data as input for your recommendation or decision. Being able to use judgment and assess the situation *beyond* the procedure / policy has proven to be a great differentiator for me and people I have worked with as we have gone on to be viewed as business leaders – adding *business* value. We have advanced because of our ability to assess the intent of the procedure, policy or rule against the exception without compromising our integrity, the quality and the business. Yes, it can co-exist!

CONFRONTING THE BRUTAL REALITY. At the other end of relevancy, is the quality system maintenance guy whose job is to *police* the operation to ensure the quality system appears to be in *order* and when the next auditor drops by, an

audit "pass" is achieved. Yes, a little dramatizing, but you're still reading. What is my problem with this? I'll stop at 3:

1. It enables the reality of <u>two separate worlds</u> - the real "how we get product out the door" and the not-so-real "how we pass the quality audit".
2. There's a <u>lack of cross-functional quality ownership</u> – many times *designing quality in* becomes secondary to the higher cost alternative *inspecting quality in*.
3. A <u>missed seat at the table</u> – an experienced quality professional has a unique toolset and c-suite personnel who view the quality function in the traditional sense are missing a huge opportunity to bring a critical thinker with a broader perspective to the table.

STILL DOUBTING THERE'S AN IMAGE PROBLEM? When was the last time your organization had a major initiative or transformational opportunity and someone in the c-suite considered someone in quality? What is the average years-of-service in your quality organization and how does it compare to other departments? When was the last time your quality organization came out with a change initiative that was widely adopted?

THE WAY FORWARD. How can we get the quality profession a seat at the table, to be relevant? I offer 3 ideas:

1. Take ownership in the business! Stop refereeing or running water bottles in – call a play and go out for a pass! Insist on cross-functional engagement in the quality process (<u>NOTE</u>: one way you can do this is with technology and creating automated work flow). Remove any inspectors you have in the "value stream" and train the operators to own their quality. Get your team involved in the new product discussions and customer visits.
2. Develop your personnel. Create a development plan that not only includes various quality classes, but add things like: Creating a Business Case; Understanding Financial Statements, etc.
3. Create an internal marketing campaign that encourages other departments in the organization to hire you, i.e., use your services! Why should engineering or marketing hire you to help translate the voice of the customer to quantifiable needs?