

## Who Is Responsible for Quality?

I belong to several groups on the Linked In web site. I find some of the discussions both fascinating and informative. Not long ago, on one of the group sites a member posted the following question for discussion: “Who is responsible for quality?” 43 responses were submitted during a five-day period, among them:

- Wouldn't each individual that has a part of the process be responsible for quality?
- The Production Department is responsible for quality while the Quality Control Department is responsible for providing the tools, processes, and consulting expertise (e.g., Black Belts) to support other departments in their quality and process improvement work...
- Short answer EVERYONE. However, ultimately quality falls upon the supervisor/manager of the particular area in question...
- Everyone.
- Quality is under the responsibility of company management. Quality can only be achieved if all the departments care about achieving it...
- Everyone in everything he/she does. Otherwise, it is a case of “anybody, somebody, nobody.”
- Everyone in the organization is responsible for quality, on process ownership concept.
- We should all be responsible for the quality of what we ourselves produce and for the process in which we are engaged. We should not be dependent on someone else to look for and find what we missed...
- The quality of the product is dependent on the quality of the process, input material, the equipment, staff, systems, data, etcetera. So, everybody is responsible for a part of the cake...
- Short answer: personnel performing work affecting conformity to product requirements are responsible for Quality.
- I remember a mirror where on the back side the question is shown "Who is responsible for quality? See the answer by looking on the back." If you turn it you can see yourself in the mirror. This answers the question of ownership. Everybody must own quality.

A group member named David took the discussion beyond the level of mere platitudes when he wrote, “Who is responsible for the quality of what? Dr. Juran told us that asking who is responsible for quality is futile until you define the actions and decisions (Chapter 11-4 *Quality Control Handbook*, Third Edition).” David motivated me to draft and submit the following:

Quality, however defined, is the responsibility of management and management alone. It cannot be delegated; it cannot be dodged – no matter how many green belts and black belts you want to certify and deploy. Long ago, Dr. W. Edwards Deming wrote, "'Your work is your self-portrait. Would you sign it?' NO!! -- not when you give me defective canvas to work with, paint not suited to the job, and brushes so worn that I cannot call it my work" (*Out of the Crisis*, p. 65).

David was right to note, however, that "Dr. Juran told us that asking who is responsible for quality is futile until you define the actions and decisions (Chapter 11-4 *Quality Control Handbook*, Third Edition)." On page 7.5 of the same text Juran provided insights to why the question is futile because the assignment of responsibility depends on:

"1. The extent to which these units have been trained to perform the work elements." [Who is responsible for the training? *Management!*]

"2. The prior record of initiative or resistance of these units in responding to new ways." [Who is responsible for removing barriers to initiative? Who is responsible to "prove the need" for the new ways? *Management!*]

"3. The traditions with respect to separating planning from execution and the use of staff versus line." [Who is responsible for promoting appropriate traditions? Providing the structure for planning, execution, staff and line responsibilities? Who too often separates planning from execution, dumbing down jobs and robbing people of their right to pride of workmanship? *Management!*]

"4. The volume of work. As the company grows in size and complexity, the staff activities tend to proliferate." [Who controls systems for planning, organizing and control of work? Who is responsible for preventing proliferation of undue complexity in staff and work activities? *Management!*]

Management is responsible to provide leadership that will create, provide and sustain a healthy work environment in which all employees are continually seeking and taking action on answers to the following questions:

- ◆ Who are my customers?
- ◆ What are their needs?
- ◆ How am I doing?
- ◆ What can I do better?

Even in such a healthy work environment, management and management alone remains responsible for quality. Everyone else, however, can and will be held responsible for accomplishing never-ending improvements in their immediate work groups and jobs.