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690 King St., Suite 2, London, Ontario N5W-2X3 Phone (519)-667-1720 1-800-837-7046 Fax (519)-667-1722

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How To Empower Individual Team Members

Since individual team members have to be empowered for the group to take action, a team leader needs to know how to empower another person.

A team leader can begin by using the 4 Leadership Strategies (S1: Directing, S2: Problem Solving, S3: Developing, S4: Delegating), as outlined in August's issue of *Process Quality News*. To empower team members, leaders have to:

- Give clear directions and clarify expectations (S1: Directing)
- Delegate meaningful assignments (S4: Delegating)
- Stay in touch with and provide support to team members, helping them make their own decisions (S3: Developing)
- If necessary, be prepared to make timely decisions based on team members' input (S2: Problem Solving)

Not all team members should be treated the same way however. When team members take on new assignments, leaders need to:

- Provide explicit, detailed directions and expectations (S1: Directing)
- Limit the time members have to work alone (S4: Delegating)
- Limit the number of decisions that team members must make (S3: Developing)
- Concentrate on identifying and correcting problems (S2: Problem Solving)

In contrast, when team members handle familiar assignments, leaders need to:

- Provide limited directions that give team members more flexibility in how they achieve the mission (S1: Directing)
- Give team members lots of time to work alone (S4: Delegating)
- Support team members' decision-making responsibilities (S3: Developing)
- Rarely make decisions themselves (S2: Problem Solving)

Unless each team member knows what is expected, analysis won't result in action. If team members can't get the support they need or timely decisions made for them when they get stuck, they are not likely to accomplish their objectives.

"Vision Should Start With The Customer"

This, according to Arthur C. Martinez, chairman and CEO of Sears Roebuck and Co., who was speaking at a quality conference last Fall. "The customer," he said, "should be the focus of all major activities starting with the development of a company's vision.

"I've read at least 150 vision statements from every part of the country. Most of them read like a United Nations charter: 'we're going to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and achieve world peace.' But they didn't organize around the principle of the customer. They worked backward from the customer, trying to integrate everything that the companies did.

"When Sears developed its vision, the senior managers asked: "what is it that we, as an enterprise, want to be known for?" They came up with three simple concepts around which Sears now galvanizes and moves the company forward. Sears wants to be a:

1. Compelling place to shop
2. Compelling place to work
3. Compelling place to invest

"The most important element in this vision is that it starts with the customer."

Loyal Customers Pay Off

Loyal customers are critical to a company's profit because they are a continuous source of income. They provide higher profits, repeat business, higher market share, and referrals.

Companies should seek lifetime customers because it costs five to seven times more to find new customers than to retain customers you already have.

To calculate what one lifetime customer is worth to your business, multiply the profit a customer generates for your company each year by the lifespan of the customer, and then multiply that number by every customer that the company gains through word-of-mouth advertising.

A Common Misconception

A common misconception with managers of small companies is that QA work is limited to inspection, testing, and documentation. Quality assurance is actually a management function that integrates the quality activities of the whole organization. Its major role is planning, organizing, facilitating, and implementing procedures to improve quality in all operations, and to hold gains achieved. The QA department should be perceived as a group that helps others achieve their own quality goals.