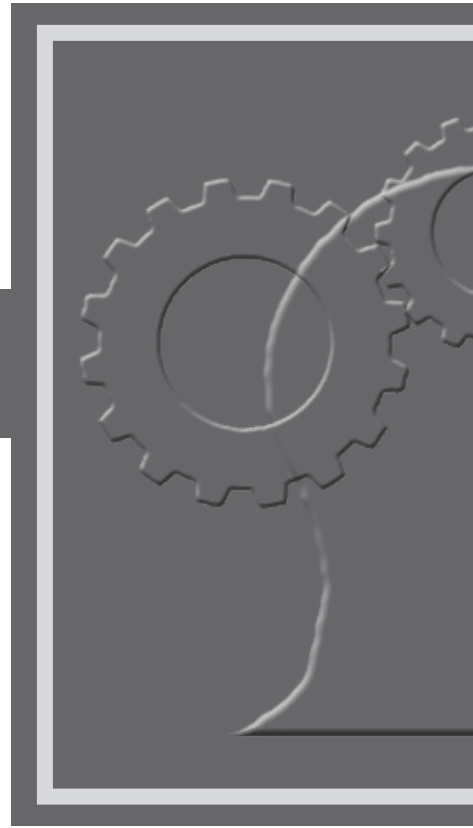


Understanding Excellence

Joseph C. Samuel



Excellence and quality are the two words that Christians need to be passionate about. The term excellence is often referred to something that is extraordinary, something that stands out in the crowd. When one comments about a presentation that it was excellent it could mean that the presentation contained nice charts and graphs, or the presenter had wonderful oratory skills or it could also mean that the presentation did really cater to the needs of the audience. When we say that a company is excellent, to the person it may mean a good pay or a plush office or a high profit margin or it could also mean that the service standards are high. So excellence means different things to different people and doesn't have a common measuring rod.

At the same time we never fail to appreciate what is truly excellent, be it character, work, dexterity, attitude, traits or relationship skills. An exquisite piece of art or a graphics will make us "wow". About a leader who steer the team, company or a country through the turbulent times with his inspiring leadership, personality and tact we wouldn't miss a beat to say "excellent". We are endowed with an inborn capability to discern what is excellent and not-so-excellent. We can differentiate between mediocre and exceptional, inferior and superior. So the sense of excellence is innate.

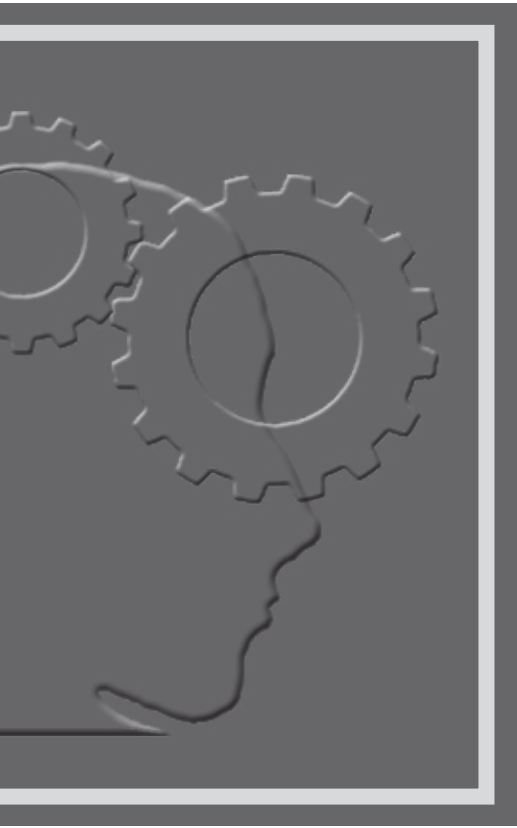
By definition excellence is a special feature or quality that confers superiority or the quality of being exceptionally good of its kind. As excellence is an abstract term and we need a standard by which we can measure it. This brings us to the term quality.

THE FACE OF QUALITY

Excellence and quality are inextricably linked. Excellence is the front end and Quality is the back end. Excellence is the face that everyone sees and quality is the tissues and sinews that the excellence is built upon. Excellence is dining room where we feast and quality is the kitchen where the delicacy is painstakingly prepared. Behind excellence we see long years of training, intricate planning and careful execution. When we see excellence we see quality. Excellence ceases to exist in the absence of Quality. Quality, when systematically and painstakingly built up over a period of time transforms itself into excellence.

QUALITY DEFINITION

Quality in a product or service is not what the supplier puts in. It is what the customer gets out and is willing to pay for said Peter F Drucker. In short, quality is delivering what the customer specifies.



- Why Quality Matters.

In the context of missions our customers don't generally specify anything in particular. In Church we think the customers are the people, in ministry the people to whom we preach; in a mission hospital, the patients. Just like salvation, our services are generally considered free for our perceived customers - the books, the tracts, some times medical treatment. Our customers don't pay or pay very little for our products. So our definition of customer needs a revamp.

One day our pastor walked on to the stage looked at the room seated to the capacity and asked "where is the audience?" He was teaching us a new perspective of worship that day. Jesus, He is the audience. To use a market term, He is the 'customer' we are catering to. All our actions must flow from that one reason. It is to him we give accounts. It is He who approves what we do. When we have Jesus as our focus we have a different customer perspective.

QUALITY IN CHRISTIAN BELIEF

Quality is in the heart of Christian teaching and faith. Quality touches upon the very fabric of Christian work ethics. Our Bible speaks about a God who saw the work of his hands and said it was good. From there on and on the

cross, when God gave His only Son it was the perfect and most beautiful work He could undertake. The glorious hope that we have is but the most magnificent work of splendor which He is preparing for us. I fail to understand how we could condone inefficiency as it is diametrically opposite to the Biblical teaching?

POOR QUALITY-THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Poor quality is considered inexpensive. This concept could not be further from the truth. We see this elephant on our desks, shelves, warehouses and boardrooms but we fail to take notice. Check this out.

a. Poor mailing list

During one of my consulting assignments with one of the prominent Insurance companies we have found that wrong addresses amounting to 50% caused them to lose the more than 2 crore every year. Just imagine that of the 5000 mailing addresses your organization has 5% of it is wrong. This means 250 addresses are wrong. If you are spending Rs. 5 for each mail it will cost nearly 1250 month on wrong address. The annualized figure is 15,000. Please note: this expenditure benefits none. Do you think it doesn't hurt you really? Let's see.

This also means that you have lost the opportunity to connect with 250 of your supporters. If you are raising funds for your projects through these mailers the actual loss is much more. Suppose each of them support you with 100Rs a month the annualized opportunity loss is 300,000!

Also imagine that you lost touch with them completely and you have to find 250 new people and for each you have to spend Rs. 1000 by way of the development officer salary, his travel, office expenditure, mailers, incidentals, promotional material it will cost you another Rs. 250,000.

Now imagine that this development officer works on 250 new contacts instead of replacing the old ones you have just lost another Rs.300,000 on account of lost opportunity.

Poor mailing list could cost your organization a whopping 865,000 a year. How much of man power and work will it take for you to raise this amount? What costs more - high or poor quality service?

So a mere 5% of poor quality just in your mailing address could cost the organization much more, not less. It's the little details that are vital. Remember both God and the devil look into the details. Little things make big things happen.

b. Wrongly placed files and documents

Suppose your organization has 50 workers in your office and their average salary is 5000 p.m. Suppose each of the workers spend an average of 10 minutes per day of their time searching for documents/ files. That means they spend 10 minutes x 50 workers x 25 days p.m. x 12 months = 150,000 minutes p.a.

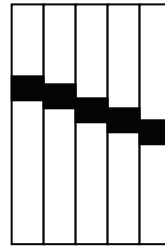
If one person works 8hours day x 60min per hour x 25 days pm x 12 months = 144,000min/ year

That is $150,000/144,000 = 1.04$ year

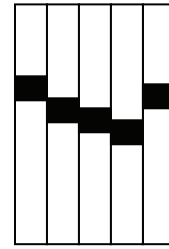
This means you employ one person for a whole year just to search for files.

How we keep the files will determine how fast we retrieve the files. Given below is a simple technique how to store files with visual control.

Can you identify in which shelf which file is wrongly placed?



Shelf 1



Shelf 2

There are many simple techniques available. This will reduce a lot of your time and thus money and other resources. There are other benefits as well. Visual control will help anyone to monitor and ensure that all the things are in place. Never take for granted small details that are critical for quality control on the long run.

8. INGREDIENTS OF QUALITY

1. Quality is about having the quality obsessed leadership

The height in which an organization sours is the height where the leader is placed. The standard of an organization is the standard of the leader.

In Hyderabad I met a person who was doing a 2 crore business four years before. In four years time his company touched 1000 crore turnover. Quite difficult to believe, right? Not if you meet him. He has one passion-to transform his company into one of the best in the construction field. He updates himself with the latest management skills by attending seminars and executive programmes and has a thorough knowledge of all the aspects of the business. His next dream is to make his company into a 1 billion dollar company by 2012. He is not only making a financial projection. He ensures that all the aspects of his business go in tandem with his plan. He selects the best in the industry, retains them, encourages them and trains them. He also has a dream WHAT his company must deliver and HOW to reach his financial goals. He knows the niche of the market that he must cater to. He knows how, when and where to expand to attain his goal.

If you meet his employees there is one common thread in their thinking - the plans of their company. He has successfully transferred his dream to his people. They



own the vision now. His passion is now their passion. He has rallied the team around his dream.

People recognize what management believes in. Your unspoken words carry your message accurately. The actions of the management will speak louder.

Leadership entails raising of standards. Your personal standards determine where your organization will go and how your organization will be. Read books, attend executive skill development programs and update yourself, network with other good leaders who have already set their mark in their respective fields. If need be, take the help of an external consultant who would help you with improving the standard of the organization. Above all, make quality your priority. Other things will follow.

To Ponder: Is quality a critical priority for you? Are you able to impart the quality values to your team? Does your team own your vision or are they just doing what you are asking them to do?

2. Quality is about having a quality vision

As leaders we know WHERE our organization should be in 10 years. But we haven't thought much about HOW our organization should get there. When you answer WHERE, it entails your macro plans but HOW brings in the detail.

Pastors may want the church membership to run into thousands. But the quality of discipleship that we want to have is probably not part of our vision. We want to reach 500 towns next year but how systematically we cover the towns is not our part of our vision. We want to send 100 missionaries in next 5 years but probably we haven't included in our plan to impart the skills they require to be productive and to survive in the cross cultural assignment.

For productivity there are two equally important aspects. One is the seed and the second is the place. Best seeds at best place will deliver best results.

We plan to increase the turn over of the mission hospital but what about the quality of service we want to provide in return?

It was David's heart to build the temple. It was his dream, his brain child. His vision statement about the temple goes like this "the house that is to be built for the Lord shall be exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious through out all lands." He strongly pursued the dream till the day he handed over the responsibilities to his son Solomon. He got the planning, including the drawing, done.

Later when it was built it became known as Solomon's temple, not David's. But it is the dream of David that Solomon built exactly as ENVISIONED and PLANNED by David. Eventually it became the temple that was exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all lands.

To Ponder: What is the quality of the vision you have for your organization? How do you want your organization, your department, your church to be? What are the specifics, beyond numbers, do you have for your ministry?

3. Quality is about having right people at the right place

For productivity there are two equally important aspects. One is the seed and the second is the place. Best seeds at best place will deliver best results.

The quality of your team starts at the selection process. Parameters that you set will determine the kind of people you get. You need to specify what kind of people must join your organization. Their skill sets, aptitude, inclinations, speciality, soft skills, temperament all play a vital role in the performance. You need to have a clear understanding of the skills and attitudes that you are looking for the specified role. Write it down and meticulously check if

their skills match your desired, listed specifications. It is possible that a person with the gift of the gab can be mistaken for a skilled person. Hence we require a written set of standards to evaluate the candidate.

It is equally important to place them rightly. Place them where they bloom. I knew a girl who was in the front office. Somehow she didn't fit into her job. I recognized she was an introvert. After observing for a while I had a talk with her and offered her a job in the supply chain management. The department that used to have a lot of noise suddenly became silent. The efficiency increased. The products were packed and delivered in time.

It is often easy to discard a person calling them unproductive because of their failures but placing them in the right place requires a genuine interest, good analytical skills, good understanding of their temperament and good judgment of their strengths.



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To ponder: What are the parameters that you have set and meticulously check in the selection process? After selection how do you ensure that they are placed rightly?

4. Quality is about specification

Then David gave to his son Solomon the PLAN of the porch of the temple, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms and the room for the mercy seat; and the PLAN OF ALL THAT HE HAD IN MIND...

Transfer your vision as plans and specifications on what to deliver and how. Do it in three stages. Induct, describe, appraise.

⇒ Induct

Imparting the quality thought starts with the Induction programmes. That is how they are given the taste of the organization's culture. Use this time to introduce them to the best practices of your organization to execute the job well and to get it right first time.

⇒ Job description

There must also be a written manual how to execute the job in a right way. If you don't have a right way to do the job it is only a matter of time they invent a method that suit their purposes not of the organization. Develop a scorecard which will help them to evaluate their own performances. Be specific in telling them what the organization expects.

⇒ Performance Appraisal

To the extent possible always measure performance objectively. Use job description as your base and develop

key performance indicators (KPI). Always trace it down to measurable level. If you are in distribution of free literature in schools measure not by number of schools but by children contacted. If they are in data entry, measure by number of good and bad entries. Only the respective organization can determine what is expedient to their objectives and strategy. Performance appraisals are not references for punitive measures but tools to help employees excell.

To ponder: Which process do you use to transfer your vision to your employees? Have you developed measurable specifications for each and every activity of your workers? Is your performance appraisal system transparent and clear to the one who evaluates and the

evaluated?

5. Quality is about aligning your strategy and activities

Strategy bridges the gap between where we are right now and how we fulfill our mission. It details who is our target audience, the geographical location we operate in, what are the challenges, what are the possibilities, how we will get in touch with them, what message we want to communicate, what service we want to provide, in what time we want to address their issues, which mode of communication we must use.

An ongoing and constant realignment of strategies and activities will reveal that we actually spend our resources on the work that we are not supposed to do or that which gives minimal returns and that we don't do things that we are supposed to do.

Balanced Scorecard is a tool that we can use to measure the activities and to ensure that our activities are in alignment with our strategy. If you are interested to know more about this please read *Balanced Scorecard: Step-by-Step for Government and Nonprofit Agencies* by Paul R. Niven.

To Ponder: Do you have a clearly laid out strategy including the time frame? How do you ensure the activities of your organization are in tandem with your strategy?

6. Quality is about rightly allocating the resources

No one can execute the job well if they are asked to do the job without providing the right resources, right amount of resources.

David when he entrusted the job he didn't stop with the plan. He went ahead arranging the resources. In 1 Chronicles, he tells Solomon "With great pains I have arranged 100,000 talents (about 3,450 metric tons) of Gold and 1,000,000 talents (about 34,500 metric tons) of silver." He also arranged the skilled workmen from all over the land even from foreign countries and ensured the support of the leaders.

Our resources must be spent on the best people, best equipments, best of everything to execute the job well. Don't take me wrong. I didn't say splash it on extravagance. There is a world of difference between these two.

Right software at right price can do wonders in your organization. Acquiring will not solve the problem but

utilizing will. We don't bother about the features that are currently there in the software and work with the minimal features. We are squandering resources if we spend more time conducting meetings and less time working on the decisions; when we don't invest in an intercom and ask people to walk around each time; when we don't plan the order of seating which causes people to move around too often; when we have too many forms to fill up and too very often and most of them contributing only to data obesity and not information; when we use manual gumming instead of pre-gummed labels and waste productive man hours.

Resources are precious. Learn to allocate resources. Utilize it, optimize it.

To Ponder: How do you ensure that you have allocated the resources correctly? What are the parameters do you consider while resource allocation?

7. Quality is about training

There are multiple benefits associated with training

- a. It improves the organizational efficiency
- b. Increases speed of the work and reduces waste
- c. It increases the self confidence of the workers and develops respect for the organisation
- d. Well trained employee is the best brand ambassador of the organisation.

There are five phases to training. Identify the training needs, define the objective, design the training module, identify the trainer, and evaluate the programme.

Our resources are limited and at the same time we can't have one-size-fit-all training programmes. So we need to meticulously plan the training by analyzing the job description, the current challenges they face, and the new developments in the process methods. Once we are sure of the requirement we need to define the objectives and the result you need to derive from this training. Never fail to do these. 1. Write your objectives down. 2. Always ensure the results are expressed in measurable terms.

Designing the training module is important. If the training module has more excipients than solutions then it will waste the time and also the seriousness of the programmes. It could also be that there are more content than we actually require. This will not add value and will cost more. So designer of the training program has a vital role to play.

During the selection of the trainer be objective and see if the trainer satisfies all the requirements to be a trainer including his knowledge of the subject and the experience. The best resources may be lost during delivery. So his delivery skills are equally important.

Most importantly measure the effectiveness of the training programmes against the objectives. See if there is an actual improvement. It will help you in improving and fine tuning the training programmes

Invest on people. It pays rich dividends.

To Ponder: Do you have a system to identify the training needs of your organization? Do you allocate sufficient funds in the budget to train your employees? What is the percentage of the training expenses in your budget?

8. Quality is about accountability

People don't respect what you don't inspect.

In Mathew 25 Jesus tells the story of the master who distributed the talents to the three servants. Finally he calls for the accounts. In verse 25: 1 He starts by giving the introduction "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like..." and goes on to say three stories – 10 virgins, the talents, sheep and goat.

In short, the Kingdom of God is about accountability. Accounts and accountability is a Kingdom principle. Bible places great emphasis on accountability. Bible speaks in very strong words in Ezekiel 22:14, "Will your courage endure or your hands be strong in the day I deal with you?"

And what He will do on that day is the performance appraisal.

When I helped a Christian Charity by serving as a trustee one of the difficult things we faced was to get the reports. Yes it is God we are serving. Bible has ample examples where people reported, the spies went to spy Canaan, the people who came to Nehemiah, the disciples when sent on a mission by Jesus. Everyone reported. Reports will help us to have the account of the situation, to keep people accountable.

The best way to keep people accountable is to measure. Measuring will help you how far you have progressed, it will help you to identify the opportunities and potential, where the focus must be. It will also tell you where

you have failed; if there is a change in focus required; if any tweaking is required; if any change in personnel is required and help you gear up to the threats. Try to make the reports more objective than descriptive, more measurable terms than immeasurable ones, more tangible results than intangible.

Reporting has two fold benefit attached to this.

1. Writing report will give us a sense of accountability and accomplishment
2. It will help the leaders in allocating the resources rightly, identifying the needs, appraising the workers along with many other auxiliary benefits.

To Ponder: Do you insist on reports? Are your reports objective or descriptive? Does your report reveal the actual situation, both good and bad or hide facts? Does it lead to information for action?

Is quality optional?

In the cartoon animal crackers Eugene the elephant comes to the pond to drink water where Lyle the lion is already there. Eugene says "would you like to leave or be crushed under". In the next scene Eugene is enjoying in the pool and says to himself "I like to give choices".

Quality is not a choice between mediocrity and good but better and even better. Quality is not about more expenses it is about goodness that comes free. Quality is not just about commitment, it is about involvement.

When we are under deep trouble we start the blame game. Remember: No blame requires no excuses.

What if you fail?

If you fail in the process only the process failed, you haven't. Take courage to get up and walk again. Try again. Quality is about striving forward even as we fall forward.

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