

# Building Quality

## into your Laundry Operation

By Charles Berge



***Quality: The standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind.***

Quality, quality, quality it seems that no matter where we turn today we are being preached to about quality of this or that. One only needs to Google “quality awards” and realize the search needs to be more defined. But I did realize that there seems to be a quality award for just about anything you can think of.

I have worked for a national industrial launderer in the past and I do understand the need for quality. I also know they spent a lot, and I mean a lot, of money trying to tell everyone they were a quality linen laundry supplier. We did surveys, calls, just about anything you can think of to try to measure quality. What I really learned from all that is that quality, for everything we make it up to be, is simply “customer service”. Each of our customers, for the most part, had different levels of what they perceived as a quality product. So how do you meet those quality expectations?

A wise general manager once explained it to me this way: There are two extremes of quality product we can supply as a linen supplier. The top being all brand new merchandise delivered each day. The second would be if we didn’t care and delivered rags each day. Well, we all know if we provided new linens each day our costs would put us out of business as well as we would have to charge ruined after they were used by the customer. And if we provided rags to all of our customers we wouldn’t be in business for very long. The key is to realize that our quality standard has to be somewhere in the middle. We have to realize and condition the customer who expects the high level of quality that sometimes there might be one they reject. How we handle that as a company will dictate the quality of product and service we provide.

***But how do we incorporate quality into the design process of a new laundry operation?***

Our job as a designer of laundry operations is to give you the tools to provide a quality finished product. I know what the everyday issues are that you face to provide a quality product but I do not have the power to manage the daily quality levels.

- Controlling labor costs.
- Designing a proper and efficient flow of goods through the facility.
- Provide properly sized mechanical infrastructure to support the size of operation.
- Assist in the equipment decision process to make sure the proper equipment is in place to provide a quality product.
- Make suggestions as alternative production and utility monitoring systems.

## Controlling labor costs

This might be the hardest one for both parties. I understand that if we design a facility to operate at 140 - 160 PPOH that maybe the quality will suffer. Production labor verse quality of the end product is a determination that has to be made by the laundry management team. Does the lower labor cost outweigh any quality issues? If you handle those issues properly when they do arise then maybe a high production rate is good.

## Designing a proper flow through the facility

If we can design the proper flow in the plant then attaining a higher PPOH will be easier, as well as, still providing a quality product.

In addition we need to generate the proper air flow for a healthcare laundry operation from clean side to soil side. My personal opinion is that all laundries should be designed with a similar air flow in the plant.

## Providing properly sized mechanical infrastructure

It always amazes me the number of facilities I see that are not in balance. What I mean is that the mechanical (water, steam, and air) are not sized properly for the amount of work that is being done in the laundry. If you cannot provide the proper water temperature or enough steam to attain the proper wash temperature your quality will suffer.

I also see water and steam lines that are too small for the operation. This will cause the equipment to have long run times affecting the productivity of the laundry operation as well as the quality.

I have seen numerous laundry operations that have grown to the level that they actually run out of water in their water tanks! Now all of the efficiencies are gone in any process water system.

## Assist in equipment decision process

When a laundry operation decides it is time for a new laundry

it is important to look to outside sources for guidance. I know what most of you are thinking; that you know what you want. But what you want might not be what you need.

Plus in the reality of the laundry operation the most important part of the design is the mechanical infrastructure and support equipment in the back of the plant. Is it sized properly to handle a 50% growth over the next 10 years? What is the proper flow rate of a 4 inch water line verse a 6 inch line? What is the gas pressure in the facility? What pressure is the city going to provide? What is the boiler hp of the total plant?

If these services are not sized properly it doesn't matter what equipment you get to wash.

The knowledge an outside source can bring to the process can be very beneficial in keeping the process on track. They will also afford you the luxury of focusing on your day to day responsibilities.

## Alternative production and utility monitoring

Today there are numerous methods to measure productivity that is as close to real time as you can get. Is this something you need for your operation?

It is also possible to take utility measuring to each individual machine with the proper gauges and meters. If done properly, you would have the capability to look at the four dryers running and identify one that might be burning more gas than the others. By identifying this you can perform the proper maintenance and be proactive not reactive when it becomes an issue.

Quality is and probably always will be a moving target in the laundry industry. As a manager you will everyday face decisions that will affect the quality of the product you put on the street.

My personal belief is that at the end of the day the quality of the product provided to your customer is directly related to the relationship you have with the customer. If you are a partner with the customer and communicate honestly with each other you will be able to provide a quality product on a daily basis.

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