

## Consistency Takes Commitment

*Hal Bolter*

### Building a quality program in the facility services industry

In manufacturing, a 1 percent improvement in quality could mean the difference between hitting quarterly projections and not. For the past 21 years, I worked in an organization that served mission-critical industries, such as nuclear power, aerospace, and oil and gas exploration. These markets demanded quality excellence, with quality objectives that ensured non-conformances in less than 20 parts per million; rarely, if ever, did any of those “teens of non-conformances” reach the consumer. That equates to greater than 99.99 percent accuracy in manufacturing.

Since joining the facility Industry, I’ve noticed the similarity of several brands: Capital Grille, Ruby Tuesday, McDonalds and Starbucks, to name a few. These high-equity brands carry a perception of high quality that is mimicked at thousands of locations all over the globe.

I was in China recently on business and was surprised to find that Chinese food there is not as appealing to me as Chinese food at home. As a result, my cohorts and I made a McDonalds run every night. The Big Mac in Shanghai was exactly the same as the Big Mac in my home town in central Florida. Do you ever wonder how the cheese biscuit at Ruby Tuesday is exactly the same (and delicious, by the way) at all 600+ restaurants? Or, the Kona rub on the filet at your Capital Grille is perfect every time? It’s not just diligence with ingredients and recipes: This type of consistency impacts the supply chain, equipment, facilities, training and much more. When you experience this type of consistency, it’s proof of an active, living, breathing quality program.

### Achieving Quality

This challenge to achieve quality is just as real for the growing facility service business. Senior management expects growth and scale, and the customer expects consistency and quality from an over-promised and equally marketed brand. That said, the measure of excellence for a re-grout job or tabletop replacement roll-out could have a wide swath of acceptability. There are many variables and opinions at play. The stakeholders include the managing partner of the restaurant and their management team, the facilities management group and the corporate stakeholders paying the bill. However, the service provider has a clear understanding of what excellence looks like in the service they provide, and if the providers’ standards can be met repeatedly, then they can be confident that the client stakeholders will be more than satisfied.

Let’s take the tabletop roll-out as an example. The tables themselves are usually provided by the owner; however, the bolts (length, gauge and material) need to be consistent. If they are not specified by the owner, the service provider has to attempt to ensure consistency.

The timing of the install or length of time in the store should also be predictable. How should clean-up be accomplished afterward, and what should be done with the boxes and packing material? This should not be left to chance. What should be done with the old tables? How should efficiency be maximized for the delivery of the tables and the install itself? All of these variables need to be determined and executed the same way at each site, with several different crews over the course of several months in varying regions across the country.

## Building Your Quality Program

Now, multiply that tabletop roll-out by 15 to 20 different applications, such as cook-line upgrades, dish rings or front-of-house renovations. The task to build this type of quality program seems daunting, but if you plan to be a primary service provider in the facility industry, you must decide to take this on. Here's how:

First, you need to resource the program. As a leader, you must designate personnel and processes to your quality program. There are many ways to accomplish this, but many small businesses resource two positions: One is a field supervisor, with the role of randomly inspecting job sites and training crews. The other administrates the program.

At the jobsite, the supervisor can complete a checklist that covers safety, quality work and company expectations. The supervisor should review the results with the crew before leaving. Every crew should be inspected several times each year. Before rolling this out, meet with all of your crews to let them know that your intent is consistency and continuous improvement, not "to grade their paper." I also suggest developing an expectation for senior management to visit job sites regularly and complete the same checklist, creating an executive emphasis on quality and continuous improvement. Many dominant global brands have the same expectation for senior leaders.

A quality administrator is the second associate resource to commit. This individual is the reservoir for all non-conformances. They log all nonconformances as they come in from multiple entry points (e.g., customer complaints, project management, rework and field checklists). Then, they prepare a summary report for management review.

Management review is critical to a thriving quality program. Companies with exceptional quality results and consistency in delivery of service make quality review as important as financial review. During management review, you will want to ensure that the facility manager is satisfied with corrective action and that the root cause has been identified and addressed for each non-conformance. Determining root cause of a non-conforming activity, and creating process improvements to prevent the same occurrence from happening again, is the key to continuous improvement and the critical component of a thriving quality program.

During the next several years of your strategic plan, the expectation from both senior management and your clients will be to grow while continuing to effectively meet needs. You will balance this by hiring premier talent and training them to execute in a way that meets those expectations. In order to accomplish this in new markets, with new crews and project managers, you will need consistent processes, and a commitment to training and knowledge sharing. Committing to a quality

program is crucial to high performance and exceeding your customer expectations into the future.

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