

Ritz-Carlton Line-ups: Communicating Quality

Description

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, in the grand tradition of the hotel industry, conducts line-ups within each department every day of the year. These get-togethers allow managers to inspect their staff's appearance, update them on hotel occupancy and topical issues, and prepare them for the arrival of important guests.

The Ritz-Carlton line-ups serve another important purpose as well: They reinforce the organization's commitment to quality, an agenda and a culture that stretches from the executive offices to the custodial closets. The Commitment to Quality program features a three-tiered approach to communicating quality that includes: 1) focusing on specific quality subjects, 2) training on various quality tools, and 3) daily reiterations of different tenets of the Ritz-Carlton Basics, 20 quality tenets that establish standards for employee behavior.

First, the program concentrates on teaching one quality subject each month, and then breaks it down weekly into individual sub-topics. For example, the subject of the month of January 1995, was communication, and for the week of January 16-22, the daily line-ups focused on vocal, visual, and verbal communication.

Secondly, the quality tool taught the week of January 16-22 was brainwriting, which is a form of brainstorming that uses anonymous suggestions to facilitate discussions of subjects of a sensitive nature. Topics included defining brainwriting, when to use it, why to use it, how to use it, and how it differs from brainstorming.

The third quality training provided in the daily line-ups involves the Ritz-Carlton Basics. Each of these employee behavior standards is based on the Ritz-Carlton credo, "We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen," and each offers specific instructions on how to apply that credo to various situations. The agenda for the week of January 16-22 ranged from the consistent use of positive comments on Monday to proper phone etiquette on Thursday to the roles of employees in fire and life-threatening emergencies on Saturday.

This constant, complete, and consistent training and communication of the quality message has reaped great dividends for the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company. Employee satisfaction, as measured in internal surveys, has grown substantially. Customer loyalty continues to increase, and the roster of guests continues to grow. Recognition of Ritz-Carlton's high standard of quality came in 1992 in the form of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, which marked the first time a hotel had ever received the honor. Such business results and public rewards demonstrate some of the benefits that an overall commitment to quality can provide an organization.

Learning Points

Skeptics often discount the benefits that training employees in total quality management can have on an organization. (See "The Baldie Fund" in this library for proof positive about the financial benefits of total quality management, and see **Quality Minutes** Library 3, "Ames Rubber Corporation: Benefits of Quality Training" for a discussion of the positive, bottom-line effects of quality training.) In fact, the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, a 1992 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award winner, has immersed its employees in the quality message on a daily basis. The hotel is delighted to learn that its training has delivered both recognition and bottom-line results to the company. Ritz-Carlton is confident that the

training and reinforcement of the quality message during its daily line-ups has maintained and strengthened the employees' faith in the benefits of a quality management approach to business.

Discussion Questions

Question: What are the benefits of offering continuous quality training to the entire work force?

Answer: Generally speaking, the work force is reasonably well-educated, and, in some organizations, many employees have extremely advanced preparation in one or more technical or service disciplines. Usually, though, systematic study of the quality disciplines has not been part of the formal education or training of most individuals.

Therefore, when quality training is provided to employees, quality can become part of the necessary culture (values, practices, beliefs, norms and behaviors) that bring people together to pursue a common purpose, commitment and direction. Quality training teaches employees how to apply the concepts of quality management to their day-to-day work.

Question: Who should be involved in training for quality?

Answer: An organization committed to total quality management should involve everyone in its quality training, starting at the top and cascading down from there. Upper management should be trained first so as to develop a unified vision of the organization's future, as well as to help educate those who will be leading the TQM efforts.

Middle management should be trained in quality so they can support the quality initiative and to prepare them to act as facilitators for the various quality projects to come. Facilitators can then train employees in the hands-on application of quality processes in project teams. Quality training specifically targeted for employees can help them apply quality concepts to their daily work.

Question: Is there a universal quality training system that will work for every organization?

Answer: While there are quality concepts, processes, and tools that can be applied across the breadth of the quality field, the subject matter of managing for quality is quite extensive and multidimensional. Because no two organizations are exactly alike, a quality training curriculum should be composed of those concepts, processes, and tools which specifically address an organization's needs. High-tech manufacturing organizations will find advanced statistical analysis and "Design of Experiments" to be crucial for their engineering employees. Banks and law firms will not. Health care organizations will need emphasis on clinical quality guidelines, but government agencies and others will not. The key is to tailor the quality training curriculum to the industry and its unique environment.

Question: Does your organization have a quality training program in place for its employees?

Answer: Responses will vary. Probe: If it does, how is it applied across the work force?

Question: Why does quality training fail?

Answer: Training fails if observable, beneficial results are minimal. While there are many possible reasons for that failure, four common themes seem to appear over and over again among organizations that have experienced profound disappointment with the results of their quality training. All four of these factors can be affected directly by the participation of upper management. The most common failures include the following.

- Training is not performance oriented. That is, the individual participants either do not acquire specific skills or do not receive specific assignments to apply those skills.
- Managers of training participants do not receive the appropriate training and guidance to support and nurture the change in behavior that will be expected from the participants.
- Training is too narrow in scope. There is a poor “after training” support system, i.e., no or insufficient facilitation and/or too light in its depth. Many different processes, skills, tools, and approaches are needed to address the wide variety of quality challenges facing organizations. The training program must equip appropriate individuals to deal with the full scope of these issues.
- There is no follow-up to ensure action. Oftentimes, too much emphasis is placed on training activities rather than training results, e.g., training hours per employee rather than projects completed, money saved, waste eliminated, etc. Consequently, all training plans should be derived from and support specific quality action plans. Part of the management review of action plans must focus on the adequacy of the training for achieving needed results.