

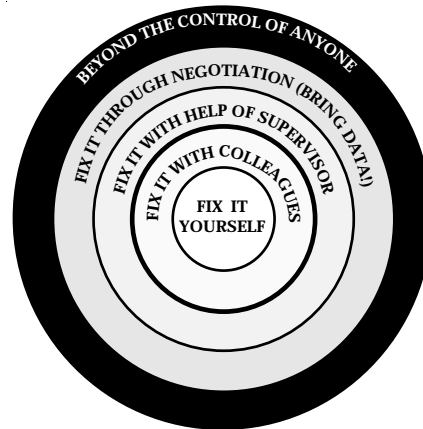
The CEO Does Not Understand Quality. So, What do I do to Save the Company?

Experienced consultants seem to agree, this question is the one most often posed by middle and lower levels of management. My first advice is this: Learn to accept that some problems are insoluble, develop a good sense of humor, recognize that you are not alone and then vow to do the best you can.

Look around for colleagues who are also interested in TQM. Today it is a rare company which does not have several enthusiastic supporters of TQM who, like you, are looking for leadership. Meet with them, regularly. Compare notes. Develop cooperative projects, appropriate to your level. If there are a dozen of you, you can prepare a report of the "committee for competitiveness through quality" and send it forward, signed by all members of the committee, in alphabetical order. Call for specific action, such as the establishment of a steering committee to promote TQM projects. As a result of such action, the "young turks", as they came to be known, were given assignments from the board, which was delighted by this evidence of concern.

Many things can be done without the participation of the CEO. The full benefits of TQM cannot be attained without real leadership from the top, but you can make interim improvements and then use them as the basis for selling the CEO, first on support and then on leadership.

Everyone has a circle of influence. There are some things which no-one can change and there are things you can fix all by yourself. Start with your own work. Apply TQM to the daily activities you control, including things in your personal life. Then, with the help of colleagues take on larger issues. A record of accomplishments is essential, but only if couched in terms the top management understands, i.e., money.



Everyone has a circle of influence.

I recall the case of a manufacturer of fine writing paper. The manager of a mill heard about TQM and, completely on his own, one day called the employees together in the mill yard. He stood on a lift fork truck and announced, "Starting on Monday, you are hereby instructed not to ship or accept from any department any product of which you are not proud." At

first people were confused, but he stuck with his policy. Within six months, he told me that scrap had been reduced to nearly zero, product quality had improved and the people had taken renewed interest in the work. (I must confess that if he had asked my advice, I would have cautioned him not to be so bold.) He was two levels below the CEO. He exercised his authority where he could. His experience later became the basis for changing the entire company. The CEO spoke to me, long after the event, with great pride.

If you do undertake your own project, there are two important reasons it may not succeed:

- a) Since you are a raw beginner, you will surely make mistakes, such as choosing the wrong project to start. I have seen several cases in which the first problem tackled was simply too big, i.e., increasing speed of response to customer complaints. Such a project spans too many departments for an unauthorized team to make much headway. (Remember, good judgement comes from bad experience!)
- b) The practices and protocols of the place may destroy what you create. I have seen attempts at TQM which were killed by a change in CEO.

Do not be dismayed by initial failures. Try again, learning something from each attempt. Initially the most important thing is for you to become proficient, personally, at all aspects of TQM. You should be in it for the long haul. Proficiency comes through doing, not just reading and talking. You must decide to be a leader, not just a cheerleader. Be a true evangelist and practice what you preach; do not pattern your actions after the evangelists you see on TV. When I meet a local TQM promotor, I ask: "What are you doing, *personally*, with TQM?" When the answers reveal it is all talk and no action, I know not to depend on that person. If you want to make a difference, just do it!

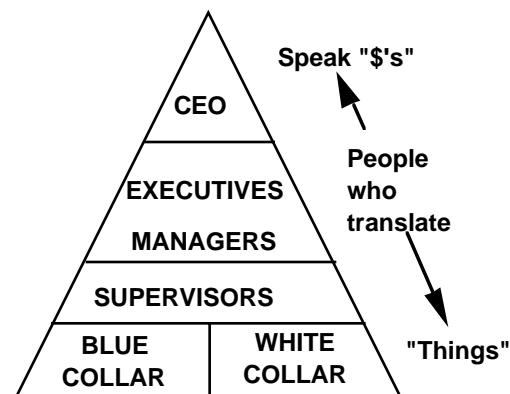
In a discreet way, find out which executives in the company are already sold on TQM. Interview them to discuss what *they can do to help you*. (If you want a powerful man to be your friend, let him do you a favor. If you offer to help him, you will lose control over the direction of the projects, something you cannot afford to do.) Suggest that these executives (and no others) participate as observers or judges reviewing your projects. If a project demonstrates good return, ask the executive to present the team for you at the highest levels. In one company, which makes wood fiber products, the presentations by people on the line, who not only had improved a process but had facts and figures to show how they had impacted the bottom line, had an enormous impression on the top management. They began to understand there is real brainpower on the factory floor and in the clerical staff. By the way, there are two things to keep in mind about these presentations.

1) They should be rehearsed, with good visuals. They should follow the format of a "QC story", i.e., explain why the project was undertaken, give data from before and after, discuss the logic of the solution, explain the economic impact and say what is to be done next.

2) In these presentations, be sure that you, yourself, remain far in the background. (Remember, what Benjamin Franklin said: There is no limit to the amount of good you can accomplish in this world if you do not try to take the credit .)

Study the speeches of the CEO and look for evidence of interest in TQM or any topic subsumed within TQM (e.g., 'just in time', 'Kaizen', 'customer care'...the buzz words). Arrange with colleagues for senior executives to send him newspaper and magazine clippings which describe TQM successes. These clippings should arrive at his desk from many different people and should not all arrive in the same week. This approach was used in one University where the President was disinterested in TQM. But when he realized that many people were talking about it, he became persuaded. He did not realize that the flow of information to his desk had been orchestrated!

Keep in mind the "Pyramid of Power" as described by Juran. In this pyramid, there is a difference in the way people speak and what concerns them. At the bottom people speak of "things". At the top, the CEO speaks in terms of "money". In between there live the "translators", who translate between *things* (such as rates of production, schedules, features, etc.) and *money* (discussed in terms of ROI, ROS, profit, investments, etc.) It is useless to express your concerns in terms which mean nothing to people who hear you.



Juran's "Pyramid of Power"

Ghandi once said: "The only form in which democracy should appear before the peasant is as food!" The only form in which you should propose TQM to the CEO is as a solution to the problems he cares the most about. Every CEO cares about profit. Reductions in waste flow directly to the bottom line. Therefore, gather data on sources of waste and propose (keep in mind the circles above) to a senior executive that you work on reducing the waste. Do it first then talk about it. Remember, it is always easier to get forgiveness than permission, especially if you are successful.

As recent events in the Soviet Union have demonstrated, there is no tidy way to change the mind set of a leader. If your leaders do not grasp the importance of TQM, you have very little job security now. You are already at risk so do not be afraid to take the initiative. Everything suggested in this note carries some risk; try to minimize the risk by concentrating on doing what needs to be done and talking about it as little as possible. At the same time, keep a good resume on a diskette in your home computer!