

## Attitude versus Success

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I recently received a question from a friend in Alaska, Randy Norville: **Why are some people so afraid of failure? Some of our most famous inventors were immense “failures”. Could overall success have more to do with our attitude towards failure than how often we succeed?**

Randy, I’ve given this topic a lot of thought myself. I’ve found that truly successful people almost never discuss or consider failure in the same language as the majority of people. They don’t see things in terms of “failure” but in terms of learning! Each trial that doesn’t work simply provides them with new information about how to better achieve success with the next experiment or the next time we use that process. They only focus on achieving their ultimate goal. Another thing really successful people have in common is that they are never satisfied with their results!

Our approach to the outcomes of our endeavors has an inordinate impact on how we continue to struggle to achieve true excellence. Most people seem to focus on all the ways something won’t work. As soon as they run into trouble, it confirms their beliefs and they simply stop trying. For example, if a person sees an outcome that is less than desirable as something to avoid at all costs, they will have a strong tendency to “play it safe” and never achieve their full potential. Even worse, the organization will suffer one of the 8 Deadly Forms of Waste...Non-Applied Talent. However, if a person sees an outcome through the eyes of “learning from the results” so that he or she can do something different next time; that is a success! Your premise that attitude is critical is precisely correct in my opinion. I tell my client’s that if you believe you can...you’re right! If you believe you can’t...You’re right!

There is yet another aspect to truly successful people that is highly correlated to this issue of attitude and that is how a person defines “good enough”. We’ve all faced situations where we are exhausted, out of time, or overburdened by all of our commitments. In these circumstances, it is so easy to proclaim that something we’ve done is “ok” and move on. Every one of us has been in that situation and each of us has made that call. Occasionally, it is a function of priority. I’m talking about something much deeper for the quality profession. Are we “practicing what we preach” to our workforce? Are we settling on “ok” quality for the quality inspections themselves when we have an opportunity to demonstrate to the organization what truly world-class quality can be?

One of the topics that I get into at almost every conference or convention I attend is how the Quality profession is not respected enough; how we are not given proper resources, or adequate budgets. I believe this topic is directly related to how we are perceived in the work force and the degree of value “they” think we bring to the table. How often do we allow something to slide because it was “good enough” when we could have stood for real excellence? People are watching everything we do and our actions set the tone for what quality means for the rest of the organization!

Recently, I was working with a Leadership Development Program at a well-respected university. It consists of juniors and seniors in an experiential leadership challenge week that is designed to push them to their limits. We work them 20-hours a day for 7 straight days (while carefully monitoring them for safety). We present them with a constant series of increasingly difficult challenges that they cannot solve alone. At every step, we relentlessly challenge them to do even more than they thought they could do, achieve greater results than they

ever thought possible. This whole concept of what constitutes “good enough” is taken to the max. They discover that what they actually achieve is so much greater than they thought they could have done, and so far beyond what they would have normally accomplished, and so radically different from what they would have gladly accepted under more normal circumstances, that it changes their perspective forever about what it means to do their very best. We’ve also seen that even after going through this experience and achieving unimaginable personal and professional growth, they will “slip back” into their prior mindset if they are not continuously challenged and coached for at least a year.

Do we do this at our jobs? Are we willing to sign our names to the final product or service that goes to our customers? How often do we settle for “ok” when we could have done so much more if we just change our attitudes about success and failure! We are often more afraid of something not working than we are of expending the effort to do something exceptional. It is my personal belief that you cannot fail until you quit trying. As long as you learn something from the experience, something you can change to affect the outcome, something that we can “tweak” or try, we have not failed...we have advanced the ball for our organizations operational excellence. And THAT is what True Quality is all about!

This column is dedicated to the memory of my friend and business partner, Ms. Sandy Miller. She spent her life in the pursuit of excellence and never accepted failure of any kind as long as I knew her. She will be deeply missed but never forgotten.

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