



## Promoting Communication: Sales, Operations And Your Customer

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Solidifying communication between operations, sales and the customer is a huge step to take in the quest for total process improvement. Often, we get caught up in the discussion of right versus wrong, good versus bad, and “is” versus “is not.”

While this data analysis approach is perfect for solving a problem, it often does not address the opportunities to strengthen relationships from the shop floor, through the sales force, to the customer.

How can we use our problem-solving process to solidify relationships? This improvement can be done by completing the corrective action loop, embracing plant visits and expanding from our training perspective to an awareness approach.

**Corrective Action Loop.** In our haste to complete and send a corrective action response to a



customer, we forget the additional opportunities that such a reply offers. Our time and focus is on the process, but often, this process ends with the faxed or e-mailed corrective action response. We are afraid to bring this opportunity up again for fear that it could open up wounds. It is time to focus on unique ways to communicate this good work to the customer.

One of the biggest chances to sell the value of our companies is during follow-up and service. Don't discount the power of following up. Beat the customer to the eventual question, “Was the corrective action effective?” Not only will you be providing great service, but you also will be serving as the customer's personal reminder that he or she needs to evaluate the effectiveness of corrective actions per the latest quality ISO standard. Your positive extra effort will not go unnoticed.

By having your sales group provide this follow-up, it ensures

that sales understands the response from the plant. A complete understanding of the process should include speaking with those responsible for effectively executing the plan. This is a prime chance for sales to meet and/or reinforce relationships with those who run the job.

**Plant Visits.** Ask your customer if your operations personnel can meet and greet the “voices of the customer.” A very good way to reaffirm your employees' ownership of the process is to demonstrate the importance of their skills. What better way than to have people from the shop floor see where their parts are further processed. If a trip is not practical, a video demonstration would be valuable.

Reciprocate. Get the customer into your plant to observe your capable processes and people. Your shopfloor personnel are key sales tools. Introduce your customers to those who are producing their parts and allow your people to be

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the most convincing salespeople you have.

Such a visit will demonstrate that ownership is in the hands of every person who has a contribution to the final product. This is not about getting people into a conference room and boring them with PowerPoint presentations; it is about taking advantage of the power of having a skilled machinist look into the eye of the customer and explain how quality is being achieved. Too often, this opportunity is overlooked.

**Get the customer into your plant to observe your capable processes and people. Your shop floor personnel are key sales tools.**

**Expand Awareness.** Think of *training* as the instructions provided for the task-oriented activities of a particular function with a focus on new processes and new people. Think of *awareness* as the continual development and education of people, both formally

and informally. Awareness focuses on educational opportunities and the need to broaden employees' perspectives of their jobs.

After a corrective action, are your people any more educated about the total process? They probably have a greater understanding of their own expertise, but rarely will they know anything more about the customer or how the problem was communicated to the customer.

Get people involved with more than "solving the problem." Work on the awareness side of the standard. Your training was part of the process to solve the problem. Expand your review for your people and educate them as to *why* the issue must be resolved.

True growth opportunities are not what we can teach employees directly about their functions. The routine of the day will be enough for them to reaffirm what works and then hone what can be done better. We can expand people's awareness by teaching them about the issues that reside "outside of the machine." The issues that lie outside the traditional responsibilities and authorities defined for a particular function

are where personal growth is begging to be developed.

Think of how much more valuable and efficient people would be if they were to have the concerns of their inputs and outputs in mind when they perform their tasks.

Continue to develop the relationships between those who sell and those who produce. An awareness program incorporating these two functions will facilitate a greater appreciation for each in their respective roles. It will reduce the blame game by providing each group with a greater understanding of the other roles that we need to be successful. Ask yourself if your people are more educated about the total process.

There are so many outstanding communication opportunities available to us. But there will never be anything as powerful as personal connection. Virtual tours, videos, Web cams and Blackberries are great ways to make immediate contact, follow-up and follow-through. They can be necessary means to facilitate communications. It is only through personal connection though, that we will develop our people and strengthen our business relationships.

## Why Join PMPA?

### N E T W O R K I N G

How many times have you run into a roadblock with a project, and then found an alternative path because you knew someone with more expertise? Or perhaps you've shortened a path to a solution because you knew someone who could put you in touch with the right person. That's called networking. The PMPA is all about networking and bringing together people with common interests—to find solutions to challenging problems.