

Internal Audit Program Improvements

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The following steps will assist in addressing other ISO 9001:2000 requirements

You have an effective audit program, but you and your team are in a rut. The same routine has been a part of your process since you implemented ISO 9001:2000. You meet all of the requirements defined within Section 8.2.2 “Internal Audit” of the standard, but it is becoming a cumbersome fact collection process without a whole lot of difference or creativity between audits.

It’s time to take your audit team to the next level. Minor adjustments to your approach will give originality to the audit. It will also bolster the objective evidence that is required within other portions of ISO 9001:2000.

Review purpose of audits

Reaffirm the purpose of your audits with all of your internal auditors. Remind the team that audits are not a game of “gotcha” with fellow workers, nor are audits a sport to see how many nonconformances can be written. The purpose of your audits is to seek improvement, not to place blame.

Top management must understand that the organization should not be concerned with the number of nonconformances found in the audit. The bottom line is that when an issue is identified, it presents an opportunity to improve the process.

As soon as people know that numbers are an important measurable factor, cooperation will lessen. In addition, teamwork will be reduced to an intradepartmental “circle the wagons” exercise until the auditor takes the team to another area of the plant.

Be creative

Take digital photographs of nonconforming issues. Get a shot of the incorrect label, the dated micrometer, the improperly staged material, the incomplete documentation and the outdated procedure. Do not include a mug shot of the person

associated with the issue. Audits are about improving processes, not identifying culprits that carry out inadequate processes.

Speak with as many people on the floor as possible during your audits. In the interest of time, some of the discussions might need to be cursory. However, the importance of involving as many people as possible cannot be underestimated. List the names, titles and job functions of all people you speak with. This approach makes the team more visible and shows that the same people are not always targeted at audit time.

Use the audit team as an additional means to gage the effectiveness of training (Section 6.2.2.a). Randomly select a person or two from each department and review their training records. Select a procedure that those individuals have been trained in, and verify that they are performing the task in accordance with the documentation.

Open participation

Be more inclusive in your opening and closing meetings. Insist that the additional participants are from the floor. This is a great opportunity for the lead auditor to make more people aware of the purpose and scope of the audit (6.2.2). A sign-in sheet is evidence of participation, and a script of your review is evidence of the information provided.

Put any photos or images in a PowerPoint format so that the closing meeting attendees have a clear visual depiction. Rather than drone on in your meeting that Section 7.6e states that equipment must be protected from damage during handling, show photos of the violations. A photo of the active micrometer being used as a C-clamp to hold a drawing in place will have greater impact than a verbal description of the viola-

tion.

Top management support

Having a top management representative speak at the closing meeting is an excellent opportunity for the new attendees to hear a coherent, non-emotional commitment to quality. Many hourly personnel may look to their supervisors when the bad issues are identified.

Top management can firmly state that nonconformances are process issues, not people issues, and that the organization is committed to ensuring that the processes are corrected. This is an ideal way to show additional top management commitment to continually improve the effectiveness of the quality management system (Section 5.1).

Share your good work

Use your quality boards to post the output from your audits. Include the findings, names of the people you spoke with and photos of the audited items. This process bolsters the evidence of your internal communication efforts. A visual of these issues provides an additional reminder of the need to be compliant with established processes and the need to prevent recurrences of violations (Section 8.5.3).

Conclusion

Section 5.5.3 of the ISO standard identifies the need for top management to “ensure that appropriate communication processes are established within the organization and that communication takes place regarding the effectiveness of the quality management system.” The audit is a perfect opportunity to ensure that all people in your plant are aware of the progress you are making. There are few better ways to work toward continual improvement of your quality system (Section 8.5.1).