

**WHEN THE BOSS STARTS
TO TALK ABOUT QUALITY
SHOULD I REALLY LISTEN?**

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MAY 1988

INTRODUCTION

THE WORD is getting around now. Quality is in. Quality is good. Quality is even free!! Everybody is talking about quality. You hear it in TV commercials. You see it on billboards. To hear all the talk, you have to say to yourself: "We've come a long way, Baby".

I served a term in Washington as a political appointee. Looking back on the experience, I can only characterize it as my "second loss of innocence". One of my advisors told me early in my term: "Look, this town is full of people who are out to use you. You have to know whom to trust and against whom to be on guard. Do you know how to read body language?" I had to admit I really wasn't an expert in the subject. "Look", he said, "It's easy. I will tell you how to know when a politician is lying".

"Watch his body. When he stops to rub his chin or pull his ear, he is not lying. If he crosses and uncrosses his legs, he is not lying. But, if he opens his mouth and starts to speak, then he is lying."

If you work in a modern corporation it is very likely you will be asked to come to a meeting to hear the chief extoll the virtues of quality. Your problem is this: How can you tell if his or her speech is indicative of a true commitment to quality? How can you tell if a manager believes a speech is really a commitment? How can you tell if you are merely hearing the fad of the week or if a new day is dawning?

These are serious questions. We are in a new era; make no bones about that. Whether or not a company will survive depends on how the management approaches its job.

In this talk I intend to give you some very simple tests to apply to the speeches you hear from your bosses when they talk about quality. Since this paper will be widely circulated and probably be read by many of your employees, it behooves you as a manager to give your next speech before the mirror and, dull as it may be, listen to yourself and ask if you deserve the credibility you seek.

DON'T SAY, "FOLLOW ME, I'M BEHIND YOU ALL THE WAY"

When the boss starts to talk, listen carefully to what he says and apply these tests:

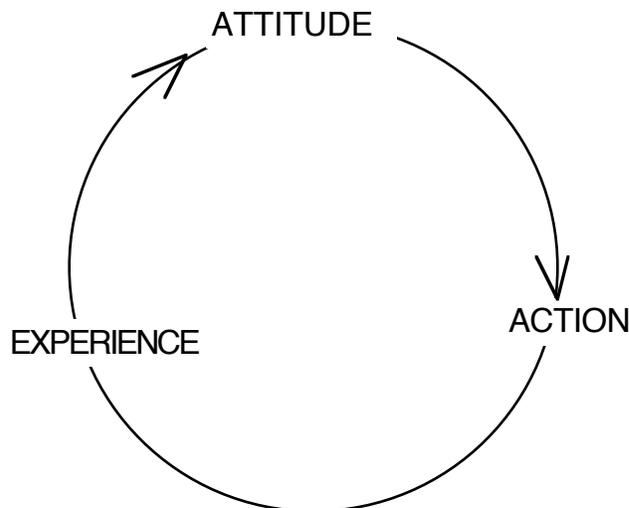
1. Does he think that his job is to motivate you to try harder and to take more responsibility for quality? (If you have a hearing aid, turn it off now.)
2. Does the boss intend to institute a reward system to recognize the outstanding performers? (Take the classified section of the want ads with you to the next meeting.)
3. Does the boss equate greater spending on more advanced equipment with going for quality? (Get your requests in early because everyone else will look upon this as the key to the treasure house)
4. Does the boss talk about what **he or she** has to learn and how he is going to learn it? (Lean forward in your chair and listen intently.)
5. Does the boss talk about specific projects in which he and his managers are (or intend to be) involved and discuss the need for more people to learn how to deal with these problems too? (Look around for how best way for you to learn, too, or you will be left behind.)
6. Does the boss talk about the need for managers to learn how to listen so they can learn from subordinates what needs to be fixed to make the system run better? (Start cheering)
7. Does the boss talk about the way managers must learn to use statistical reasoning in their jobs so they can *lead* their subordinates in understanding how the system works and how to improve it? (Pinch yourself to see if this is just a dream.)
8. Does the boss talk about how he or she and the other managers have a responsibility to study the *systems for which they are responsible* with a duty to seek advice on how to improve them? (Go out and buy more stock in the company, NOW)

9. Does the boss discuss specific pieces of data relating to improvement projects and discuss them in a way that shows that he or she understands the significance of the data. (Go home and tell your spouse that now you can afford another child.)

IT IS A GAME OF "FOLLOW THE LEADER"

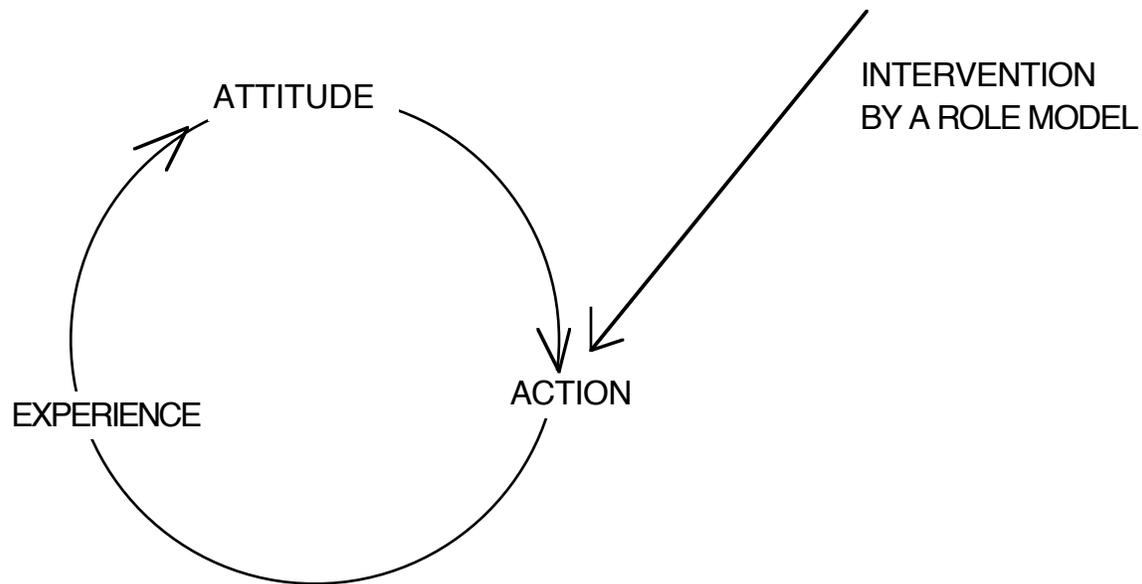
How a company functions is always a reflection of the kind of leadership it has had. Now that we are in the new era of fierce international competition, if a company is to survive and prosper, it will need to have leadership that knows how to harness the abilities of all its people. It is not enough to declare that the people are the company's most important asset. The chief executive needs to teach all the managers how to make the most of this asset. Note that I used the word, "teach". We are talking about changing the way people and organizations behave. The CEO and all the other managers need to understand something about the dynamics of change in both people and their organizations.

People seem to be caught in a vicious circle:



Too many managers think they can affect this circle by trying to change peoples' attitudes. They make speeches, they exhort, they make subtle threats, they try to arouse anxiety and they propose rewards. They look for a combination of the carrot and the stick.

Wise managers know that people do not respond to such measures. Instead they require an intervention.

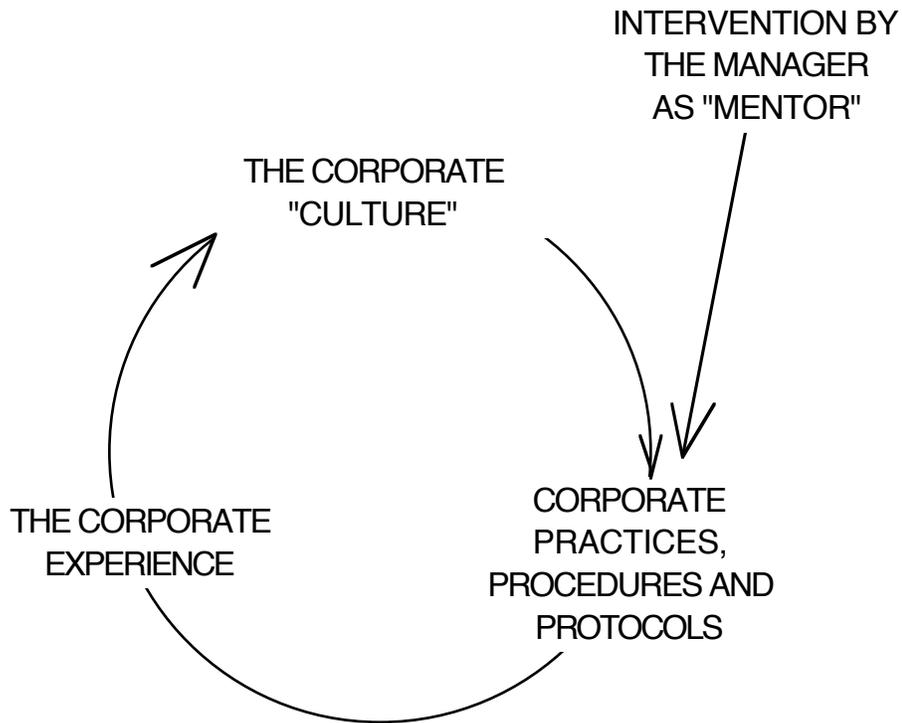


Here is a quotation from Homer Sarasohn, the first man to teach the Japanese about quality management in 1948. (Sarasohn was on the staff of General MacArthur when the first courses were given under the auspices of the military government.)

A leader's main obligation is to secure the faith and respect of those under him. The leader must himself be the finest example of what he would like to see in his followers.

Sarasohn in Japan, 1948

If you are the manager you need to learn how to be a mentor. Your task is not just to change the personal habits of the people who report to you. You must also intervene in how they work together. Just as the person requires help to break out of the circle, so do organizations.



The chief executive should challenge the managers to examine the systems which for which they are responsible and to identify the practices, procedures and protocols which need to be changed to improve the system. The CEO should study the techniques which are most effective in doing these tasks and see that the managers learn them and apply them.

If you hear the boss discuss in a knowing way how a change in practices and protocols was made, they you have a right to feel good about the leadership.

Attitudes are not irrelevant. They are just difficult to change and if you are trying to change what people do, you can use attitude as a diagnostic tool. Attitudes change as a result of experience, not exhortation or threat.

"A man convinced against his will,
is of the same opinion still".

Likewise, corporate cultures change with difficulty. You can exhort all you wish but if you leave the practices, procedures and protocols as they were, people will behave the way they did.

"If you don't change your direction,
You are likely to end up where you are headed"

Organizations change direction by changing the way they do business, that is, by changing their practices, protocols and procedures. These can only be changed by managements, which is why exhortations and rewards do so little good.

Oh it is true that people can get better results by working harder. That is the way you get temporary small improvements. It is not the way to a breakthrough in performance.

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

The next time you attend a meeting run by the boss, pay attention to the way the meeting is run.

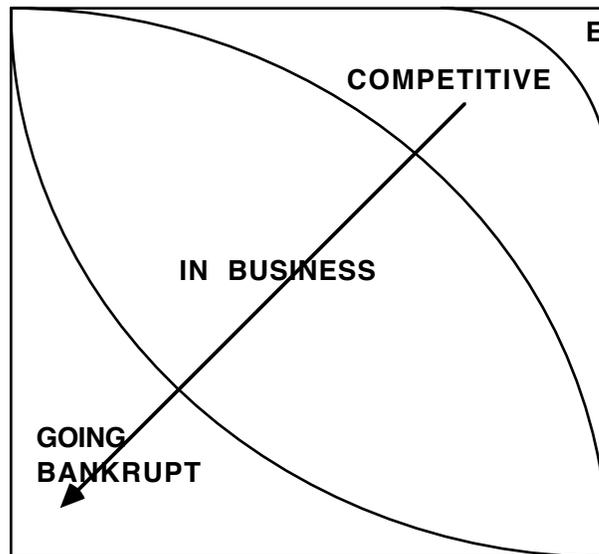
INDICATORS THE PATH TO BANKRUPTCY

TOPICS DISCUSSED AT MEETINGS

Symptoms exist. Do not want to see them.

Can see symptoms but cannot diagnose them

People are used to being sick and think their symptoms are "normal"



% Employee participation in improvement

The boss' attitude tells you more than he or she realizes.

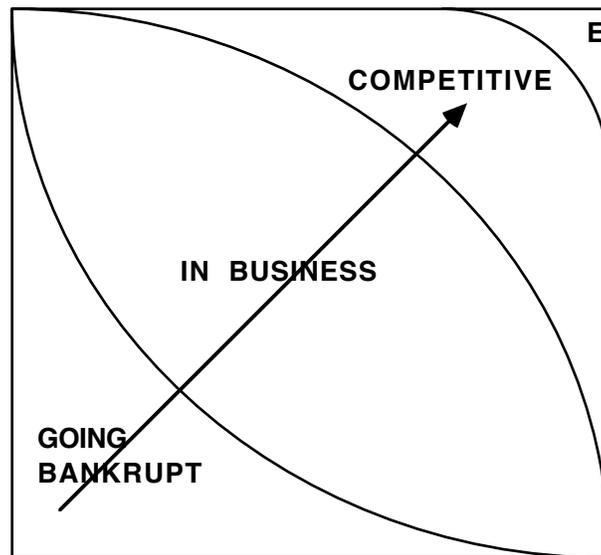
INDICATORS THE PATH TO EXCELLENCE MANAGEMENT ATTITUDES

**Sensitive to symptoms
Want to correct at
once.**

**Symptoms exist. Can
see most of them**

**Symptoms exist but
cannot see them**

**Symptoms everywhere
but do not want to see
them.**



**% Employee
participation
in improvement**

CONCLUSION

You don't have to be a psychiatrist to understand what is going on around you (but it might help). You can learn to read the inner workings of your boss' mind by what he or she says, does and tries to do. If you are lucky, your boss will have made the commitment to learn and to apply the principles of quality management. He or she will demonstrate their commitment by actually trying to use the principles. If you are unlucky you will have a cheerleader for a boss, one who thinks you are the problem and is out to fix it.

Of course you may very well be part of the problem. If you want to be part of the solution, just be sure that what is said here about judging the boss, when applied to you and your activities, will make you proud. You deserve the right to be proud of what you do. Be sure you pass along to all who report to you that same right of pride of workmanship.