

The Ice Cream Maker. *Subir Chowdhury.*

The Ice Cream Maker. *Subir Chowdhury.* ISBN:0-385-51478-6. A Currency Book published by Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc. Pages: 115.

Quality is the continuous and relentless effort to improve a product or a service. It ensures that the company meets the exacting standards every time, and thereby builds lasting loyalty. Every company must listen to its customers as they alone define what is meant by Quality. A company should not use its own criteria to judge the quality of its products or services. Innovation and Quality are two very different aspects of a business. American companies are the best in the first but poor in the second. They do not make an effort to understand what the customers want in terms of quality. Excellence is not a task that is needed to sell something. Excellence is a passion to help others. Quality means taking care of those who matter to the business. Any and every business is about people consisting of the employees and customers. Profit is the result of quality products and services but not an end in itself. As a first step in embracing quality, the company should take care of its employees first – it's internal customers. It should turn what its employees do every day out-of necessity into something that they love to do. Employees with a sense of responsibility, empowerment, ownership and fulfillment can find ways to take care of company's customers. With the right tools, training, encouragement, compensation and opportunity to be heard employees can become more engaged and invested in their work. When the right systems are setup the employees push each other far harder than otherwise possible. The better a company treats its employees, the better they treat its customers. This is the foundation of quality. A company should focus on what it does, not just the results. Once a company has established a motivated and engaged workforce, the next step is to focus on the how it works. A method called *LEO* (acronym for *Listen, Enrich, and Optimize*) can be used for this purpose. It involves *listening* to the customers, *enriching* the products and services and *optimizing* the customer experience.

A business can fail if it does not listen well to its customers. Quality is defined by the customer. A company may have its vision of what it wants to be but should make every effort to deliver what a customer wants that is consistent with this vision. A business should not assume and give the customers what it thinks that they want e.g. based on the corporate vision. Instead it should get direct input from the customers about their needs by listening to them. A customer has three types of needs – *basic, performance* and *excitement*. A basic need is so fundamental that the customer does not even ask for it but expects it to be there. A performance need makes a customer expect a certain product or service to perform as promised. An excitement need gives a customer an extra something that delights and gets his/her attention, and makes the product or service stand out. A customer may not complain or be disappointed if an excitement need is not there. But catering to such a need can dramatically increase customer loyalty. Most companies in America are better at delivering the excitement needs to a customer than they are providing at the basic and performance needs.

It is not enough for a company to simply listen to its customers. It also must enrich their experience and perception about its products and services. Innovation is a driver for achieving this. It involves every employee at every level to come up with the best ideas.

The Ice Cream Maker. *Subir Chowdhury.*

A successful company is built on a large number of great ideas. Such a company must *continuously* come up with ways to improve its products and services leading to more satisfied customers. There are three elements involved – a strong desire to change a current practice when it can be improved, full acceptance to think outside the box to create the best possible solution, and eagerness to improve anything that the company does and involves monitoring every detail of its operation. A rewarding environment for innovation should be created to encourage and foster this. When solving a business challenge, as many ideas as possible should be generated, ideas from other sources should be shamelessly borrowed, and no idea should be criticized as dumb. The ideas that specific and practical should be selected from these ideas. Next goals, deadlines and leadership should be assigned to implement each of these ideas.

Optimize means striving for perfection. It is different from improvement. Five steps are needed to achieve perfection – recognition of price of failure, doing it right the first time, focusing on details, developing productive paranoia, imparting a passion for perfection in every employee at every moment they work. The first step involves understanding how a failure can affect a business or part of a business. A small simple mistake could be disastrous to a business. The second involves designing quality as the very first step into a product or service. Fixing defects as these emerge at a later stage is a losing and costly effort. A business should make sure that it hires capable employees and that provides them with the right tools to do their job. Employee accountability and a reward and penalty system are essential as well. Employees should be encouraged and rewarded to speak up when they have any ideas or find areas of improvement across the company. Poor quality will cost company money and customers. It will eventually make it fail. The third stresses the fact that small details and improvements could indeed create big improvements and eliminate big problems. The fourth is about not getting complacent but constantly fret over what can be done about the competition, potential missing opportunities and next new possibilities. This can be a huge motivator for quality. A company should be completely honest about its performance. It must be ready to accept the reality even when it is not what is expects. The fifth step turns a task into mission, be very honest about a company is doing and what it needs to do to be the best.

Quality is about consistency. The real measure of performance of a company is how it performs at its worst *not* how it does at it best. Quality in the long run is cheaper than mediocrity. It is hard work to make quality a part of company's mission. It is also not the most glamorous endeavor and demands continuous effort and oversight from every employee. Quality is the strongest defense that a business can have.