

The Customer is King

I would like to see that quality standardisation codes be introduced for components used in Construction, says Dr Madhav Mehra

In the post-liberalisation period, every trade is open to competition - nationally and internationally. In this situation, the factors that contribute to competitiveness - quality, competitive pricing and timely delivery - play a primordial role. In order to produce quality products, suppliers must have a customer/market orientation, must establish an adequate product quality-price relationship. The market now increasingly requires adoption of quality systems as this is considered a vital factor in competitiveness, since it adds value and increases buyers confidence, says Dr Madhav Mehra, the pioneer of quality movement in India and India's first quality guru. Mehra, besides being the chairman of the World Quality Council, has been involved with quality activities and institutions for the past three decades.

"The customer is king" is truer today than ever before. As the quality of life improves, demand for better quality services and products also increases. Customers all over the world and at all times demand that they be assured and later satisfied that the products or services for which they are paying will meet their specifications, expectations and will perform as anticipated. Buyers have traditionally relied on inspection and certification before accepting any goods.

Today builders, architects, contractors and manufacturers are taking more to the norms of quality standards. A classic case is of Kirloskar Electric, which obtained ISO 9000 certification and its quality policy is to design, manufacture, market and service at competitive prices, products which result in customer satisfaction, quality reputation and market leadership.

In order to overcome competition and gain market leadership, maintaining quality standards is very essential, feels Mehra. He adds, that India is undergoing a revolution in its quality standards and foresees with confidence that India will be a part of the economic powerhouse of the world by the year 2010, as he sees Indian businessmen laying more and more emphasis to quality.

He further feels that since the customer is the king, the duty of every businessmen should be to constantly bring about changes in products, so that each customer's need is fulfilled. "The most successful businessman in today's

environment should have the ability to respond innovatively to changes", adds Mehra.

He suggests to Indian businessmen to look out for intellectual workers rather than skilled ones with an high sense of knowledge. But in comparison to other countries in the world on quality consciousness, Mehra being firm asserts "The main problem in India is that we have not been able to foster natural pride in quality. There is not a single person who does not want to do his best yet shoddy stuff continues to be produced". He adds, "By inspiring competition we are trying to inculcate a sense of pride in quality". The country's first quality guru, Madhav Mehra is determined to encourage the quality movement in the country while ensuring that it does not degenerate.

In India, its business focus is now slowly shifting from purely profit-orientations to emphasis on quality. It is important that every businessman has a clear corporate philosophy which should cover the basic purpose of business. Adherence to high quality standards should be an integral part of such a philosophy. Total quality standards have to be adopted as a work culture of any organisation than as one time prescription. Mehra says that future customer satisfaction would be the driving force behind a company's success.

The expectation of the customer is increasing as they have a wide choice of products and said that he is keen on Indian businessmen adhering to world quality standards in all spheres. He is on a quality campaign to promote the concept of quality in all sectors of economy, with particular emphasis on safety, health, pollution, energy conservation, etc. For this Mehra is to hold a world congress in total quality sometime in Feb. 1998.

Summing up Mehra cites an example of a leading builder in India who now swears by quality says, "It was the potential threat of losing customers that made me conscious of quality standards.

Now, our site staff also know in advance exactly what needs to be done at every project stage. This has helped us to be the front-runner in many bidding lists. Now the quality standards are helping us win new business, because we are able to tick the appropriate boxes on the pre-qualification documents."

● FREDERICK D'SILVA



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