

**Excellence. NO EXCUSES!**

**Excerpt:**

**Quality & Excellence:  
The Quality 136**

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## **The Quality 136: One Hundred Thirty-six Random Thoughts on Quality, Emphasizing the Elements That Are Often Missing in Conventional Quality Programs**

*A 2009 speech in New Delhi co-sponsored by the American Society for Quality led me to concoct this list. I have always had a broad view of “quality,” and decided to let my mind and keyboard go where they would—and where it went makes it design’s handmaiden. (Or so I think.)*

1. Quality is a reception desk that exemplifies and enhances the brand.
2. Quality is the enthusiasm of the receptionist’s greeting.
3. Quality is thinking through beginnings and endings with nothing less than fanaticism.
4. Quality is survival drills that test and enhance our resilience.
5. Quality is making survival drills enjoyable. (Training—regardless of the gravity of the purpose—can be a drag, or engaging.)
6. Quality is saying thank you.
7. Quality is saying thank you.
8. Quality is saying thank you.
9. Quality is mastering apologies.
10. Quality is >18 seconds of “listening time.” (Some research shows that doctors on average interrupt a patient after 18 seconds—docs are not alone!)
11. Quality is strategic listening.
12. Quality is professional listening. (Listening effectively can be treated with the gravity of learning to be a violinist or master archer.)
13. Quality is “Blackbelt Listening.” (Make the collective, professional pursuit of listening skills per se a keystone of corporate “culture.”)
14. Quality is Thoughtfulness. 100% of the time. (I insist—not that I have the least bit of power—that “thoughtful in all we do” be a key plank of our “vision and values” statement—thoughtfulness is the key to repeat business and engaged employees.)
15. Quality is Kindness. 100% of the time. Kindness pays! Kindness saves money! (E.g., fewer pissed-off customers.)
16. Quality is outside signs with no missing light bulbs.
17. Quality is the cleanest restrooms in the city.
18. Quality is inspecting restrooms once per hour.
19. Quality is the CEO getting restroom duty once a month. (Week?)
20. Quality is a map to the hospital. (Going to hospital is stressful—one stellar performer gets things off on the right foot by sending a crystal-clear map in the info packet.) (“Beginnings” and “endings” redux!)
21. Quality is getting to a meeting, getting to every meeting ... early!

22. Quality is “dress for success.” (Not fancy, but careful—a mark of respect for one’s fellows.)
23. Quality is knowing your customers’ children’s birthdays.
24. Quality is the brand—for good or for ill. (“Remarkable” Quality in ALL our interactions. RE-MARK-ABLE.)
25. Quality is an act of love. (“Enterprise” is about people, hence about emotion. One famous football coach said, “You do not need to like all your players, but you must love them.”)
26. Quality is understanding that upon occasion “shit happens.” (Nobody bats 1.000—be prepared.)
27. Quality is EXCELLENCE at cleaning up shit.

***Quality is a reception desk that exemplifies and enhances the brand.***

28. Quality is a green building. (There is absolutely positively no excuse for non-green facilities—old or new.)
29. Quality is 25 little programs that reduce waste.
30. Quality is a checklist in the ICU. (A simple paper checklist like the pilots use dramatically reduced mistakes in ICUs—not all systems have to be sexy!!)
31. Quality is compression socks for every one who checks into a hospital. (Simple often has great impact—DVT causes tens upon tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths. Generic motto in pursuit of high-impact “little” things: GIVE GOOD SOCK!)
32. Quality is washing your hands. (!!!!) (Good for you. Good for others. Good for the world!)
33. Quality is calling patients with heart problems once every two weeks to ask if they’re taking their aspirin. (!!!!) (“Quality care” depends more on the “little things” than the big things. True in ALL walks of life!)
34. Quality is matching your calendar with your priorities. (Message: Calendars never lie! Time is your only resource! You can take charge of your life!)
35. Quality is visible management. (Fanatic “MBWA”—Managing By Wandering Around.)
36. Quality is leadership assignments within days of coming aboard. (Can be done! 100% leaders—or bust!)
37. Quality is studying the science of recruiting! (Study! Study! Study—the Truly Important STRATEGIC Variables.)

38. Quality is understanding that Enthusiasm is trait #1—for every job. (Key word: Every!)
39. Quality is hiring people who, while determined, show a streak of kindness. (100%.)
40. Quality is would be recruits who show the same respect to the junior employee who ushers them into the interview room as they do to the interviewer herself.
41. Quality is understanding that if women are your primary customers, then women must be the majority in design and marketing and distribution and service! (Duh!)
42. Quality is the best 1st-line supervisory training in the industry-region-the world. (1st-line supervision = No.1 factor associated with employee satisfaction.)
43. Quality is strategy.
44. Strategy is quality.

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(Make the collective, professional  
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keystone of corporate “culture.”)***

45. Quality is Very Simple systems.
46. Quality is “beautiful” systems. (Yes! “Systems” and “beauty” belong in the same sentence!)
47. Quality is simplicity.
48. Quality is Total & Permanent War aimed at maintaining simplicity. (Enemy of the state #1: Complexity creep!!)
49. Quality is brilliant, concise written communication.
50. Quality is respect.
51. Quality is a “best place to work” award.
52. Quality is a clean street in front of the car dealership—even though it’s the city’s responsibility. (“Beginnings” and “endings” again—as you see, I’m obsessed. Car dealer Carl Sewell taught me this.)
53. Quality is bank branches that give away dog biscuits!
54. Quality is an ethos of dropping what you’re doing in a flash and helping out someone who’s behind schedule. (!!!!!)
55. Quality is being sensitive to others’ personal problems—without being intrusive. (Fine line, but important.)

56. Quality is the best differentiator for recipients of micro-loans. (I.e., QUALITY always ranks #1 in service or product importance—whether the product costs a buck or a million bucks.) (“Quality” is just as relevant to a \$1 product as a \$1,000,000 product!!)
57. Quality is finishing the job on time.
58. Quality is finishing the job on time.
59. Quality is redundancy—which ensures resilience.
60. Quality is instruction manuals that could be long-listed for the Booker prize.
61. Quality is brilliant signage.
62. Quality is brilliant packaging.
63. Quality is ease of use.
64. Quality is ease of use at your Website.
65. Quality is appreciating differences. (Homogeneity kills!)
66. Quality is diversity in all circumstances!
67. Quality is letting go those who suffer SED—Severe Enthusiasm Deficit.
68. Quality is 100 things that make it clear that you *respect* every employee—the “problem employee” as much as the star. (Read this twice—or three times.)

*Quality is 100 things that make it clear that you respect every employee—the “problem employee” as much as the star. (Read this twice—or three times.)*

69. Quality is asking “What do you think?”—a minimum of 10 times a day. (Measure this.)
70. Quality is showing class after a screw-up. (Bosses: Do not tolerate the flip of this.)
71. Quality is opening 15 minutes before official opening time.
72. Quality is closing 15 minutes after official closing time.
73. Quality is making a game out of finding systems characteristics that make customers’ lives miserable.

74. **Quality is understanding that 100% of our revenue comes from 100% of your customers—there are no second stringers. (Sure there are “core clients”—but all customers deserve to be treated like the Queens and Kings they are.)**
75. **Quality is taking the time (perhaps a lot of time) to explain things to people, understanding that the payoff is staggering.**
76. **Quality is about sharing virtually all information—rumors are worse than reality in 9 out of 9.1 cases.**
77. **Quality is a workspace—every workspace—that feels “nice.”**
78. **Quality is not perfection.**
79. **Quality is a “disproportionate response” to customers victimized by our screw-ups.**
80. **Quality is “employees first, customers second.”**
81. **Quality is understanding that your employees are your most important customers.**
82. **Quality is understanding that Job #1 of leaders is internal, not external—i.e., engaging 100% of staff in Quests for Personal Excellence.**
83. **Quality is an organization that aims to achieve “life success”—for EVERY employee. (Thanks, Dave Liniger of RE/MAX.)**
84. **Quality is making the workplace a seething den of people in pursuit of unabashed mastery of ... *something*. (Those pursuing Mastery are engaged, in general.)**
85. **Quality is using your website to the max to create customer community and partnership and unvarnished communication. SET THE BAR VERY VERY VERY HIGH.)**
86. **Quality is embracing the RPOCs/Really Pissed Off Customers.**
87. **Quality is paying customers to tell you what you did wrong.**
88. **Quality is relentlessly learning from mistakes while leaving the blame game back home. (Accountability is king—but Blamemeisters are not welcome here.)**
89. **Quality is appreciating that when you ask employees to do new things, the fastest learners will make the most grotesque mistakes.**
90. **Quality is appreciating, as the good classroom teacher does, that when you are trying new things each of us has a different learning rate and style.**
91. *Quality is repeatedly walking through every tiny step involved in what the customer experiences when in contact with your company and its processes.*

***Quality is a “disproportionate response” to customers victimized by our screw-ups.***

92. Quality is clearly understanding that there are no “bit players.”
93. Quality in services is as important as quality in manufacturing—and just as measurable.
94. Quality is, if possible, more important in small businesses than in big businesses.
95. Quality of government services should be higher than quality of private services.
96. “Quality” is the answer to the question “*What’s the point?*”
97. “Life or death” of one’s mates is the answer to the question “Why is the military obsessed with quality work and ceaseless practice and learning associated therewith?”
98. Quality is about our “positives”—and never ever involves badmouthing competitors.
99. Quality is a deep appreciation of the matchless benefits and revolutionary potential of network connectivity inside and out.
100. Quality is redundancy. (“Just in time” is fine as far as it goes—but duplicate resources are imperative in numerous situations.)
101. Quality is effective cyberdefense. (We live in an increasingly fragile world. Ignorance is not bliss.)
102. Quality is gleeful acceptance of “best safety practices.” (Safety is a primary form of respect.)
103. Quality is making safety exercises and safety manuals fun. (Safety comes from hard work—it’s about people far more than equipment.)
104. Quality is an environment that promotes good health in general.
105. Quality of the highest order is a permanent and “routine” expectation.
106. Quality is a natural aspiration “around here.”
107. Quality is a “turn on,” just like winning at sports.
108. Quality is becoming a Professional Appreciator—recognizing the smallest positive act.
109. Quality is understanding that vendor quality processes and outcomes and engagement are as important as ours. (The pursuit of quality is, well, next to useless if the Whole Damn Family is not involved and “on the same page.”)

***Quality is making “commitment to quality” (and people!) the No.1 factor in vendor selection.***

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111. **Quality is over-investing in vendor relations.**
112. **Quality is understanding that regardless of your rank, the real work is being done two levels down. (“He-she who has the mostest and bestest relations in the underbelly of the organization wins. Hands down.)**
113. **Quality comes from mastering “suck down.” (The “real work” is done “down there.”)**
114. **Quality is understanding from Nelson Mandela that “best smile wins.” (Mandela’s smile was irresistible—to friend and foe. Attend to such characteristics.)**
115. **Quality is understanding from Dwight D. Eisenhower that “best smile wins.” (Eisenhower’s smile made D-Day a success in a touchy Allied command.)**
116. **Quality is religiously understanding that “Hard is soft. Soft is hard.” (Budgets are “soft.” Relationships are “hard.”)**
117. **Quality, for hotelier or car dealer, is aspiring to Best Flowers in the Reception Area ... in the World. (!)**
118. **Quality is understanding that the quality of the facility in which the product is produced is as important as the quality of the product itself. (Quality is consistent from stem to stern—or else.)**
119. **Quality is understanding that the quality of the facility in which the service is produced is as important as the quality of the service itself.**
120. **Quality is understanding that there is no face we present that is not part of the expressed Brand.**
121. **Quality is understanding that employee entrances should be as high quality and grand as guest-customer entrances.**
122. **Quality is, as a matter of strategic habit, being fanatic about getting to know people in other functions. (Best cross-functional relationships wins—friendships are 100X more important than systems.)**
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124. **Quality is, as a matter of strategic habit, being fanatic about getting to know people in other functions.**
125. **Quality is becoming a Professional Barrier Smasher. (Boss as CHRO—Chief Hurdle Removal Officer.)**
126. **Quality is reprimanding anyone who badmouths anyone in another function.**
127. **Quality is human!!!**
128. **Quality is religiously learning one new thing every day.**
129. **Quality is individual learning goals.**
130. **Quality is small-group learning goals.**
131. **Quality is “unrestrained” “over-investing” in training.**
132. **Quality is understanding that the individual who is not growing (on some dimension, work related or not) will NOT produce good quality.**
133. **Quality is making mistakes when you try new things.**
134. **Quality is making lots of mistakes when you try lots of new things ...**

**135. Quality is  
EXCELLENCE.**

**136. Excellence is  
QUALITY.**