

From Class to Career

Course on TQL changes a Navy lieutenant's future

"STAUFFER, ON Monday morning, you will either be in that total quality leadership (TQL) class or in front of the captain, explaining why you were not there!"

With these words, my Navy division officer inadvertently put my life on a different course.

I had been involved in quality before. I worked at Ford for several years in the old, low-quality days of the 1970s. I actually drove a Volkswagen and a Toyota during that time. There, I watched a foreman follow an inspector and pull reject tags from transmissions that hadn't passed the stay-in-park test, because he "needed the numbers."

I took part in a recall of more than

100,000 Bronco transmissions because the plant industrial engineer (an English major with a two-year associate degree who was married to the plant manager's daughter) had signed an engineering waiver when we ran out of valve body filter screens.

Introduction to TQL

In the Navy, because I cared about how well things were done and how well they worked, I ended up as a quality auditor for a number of major projects. When I heard we would be doing TQL and that this was how auto manufacturers were improving quality, I was not impressed. And, when

I heard from my Ford buddies that TQL was "Japanese management," I was even less impressed. So, the first few times my division officer scheduled the introductory fundamentals of a TQL seminar, I found excuses to be elsewhere. This time, though, she wasn't letting me off the hook. I called a trusted friend, expecting sympathy, but he said, "It's not what you think it is. Keep an open mind. I think you will like it."

The class didn't start well. There were videos of Ford executives and managers talking about quality problems at Ford and videos of some old bald guy railing about statistical control. Statistics? What could



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statistics possibly have to do with anything? Then the instructors talked about systems, psychology, 14 points, driving out fear, reward systems and performance evaluations as harmful barriers. None of it made sense—until they began talking about variation.

The instructors said we didn't live in a mechanistic, deterministic world. This appealed to me because I had often felt that way and had spent most of my career fighting the feeling. Later, they brought out a container full of red and white beads, asking for volunteers to play a game. What followed literally changed my life.

Red bead experiment

W. Edwards Deming's red bead experiment had a profound effect on me.¹ That one exercise contained nuggets of new knowledge and offered answers to many leadership questions I had struggled with for years. Among them:

- Why couldn't we seem to make performance evaluation and ranking work?
- Why did internal competition always seem to fail or be harmful?
- Why was it impossible to actually do the impossible?

Suddenly, I wanted to know more about Deming, these management theories, systems, and even, incredibly, statistics.

The Navy offered numerous avenues to education. I took classes in statistical process control and basic statistics, and I signed up for 10 weeks of TQL training. I began putting together a plan to finish my bachelor's degree and went on to get a master's degree prior to retiring from the Navy.

I became a TQL coordinator, or director of quality, at a major overseas base, then went on to join the TQL Schoolhouse, a group of internal consultants for the entire Department of the Navy, where I worked as

a lieutenant until I retired.

After retiring from the Navy, I joined a quality consulting group in Minneapolis, and now I have my own consulting practice.

I still conduct the red bead experiment in all my Six Sigma and statistical process control training and leadership development seminars, and I try to present it whenever I can at quality conferences. I've found that it provides a great foundation and is a conversation starter for any course in quality, statistics or leadership. **QP**

REFERENCE AND NOTE

1. W. Edwards Deming, red bead experiment. For more information about W. Edwards Deming's red bead experiment, visit www.asq.org/glossary/r.html.



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