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nobody talks quality better than Phil Crosby."

—LEE IACocca
in his new best-seller *TALKING STRAIGHT*

PHILIP B. CROSBY

LET'S TALK QUALITY

96 Questions
You
Always Wanted to
Ask Phil Crosby

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*96 Questions
You Always Wanted to Ask Phil Crosby*

*by
Philip B. Crosby*

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*Let's
Talk
Quality*

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Preface

When I started Philip Crosby Associates in 1979, I soon realized that the educational part of the quality improvement process aimed at executives and managers had to be intensive. People just weren't going to learn in a hotel ballroom with several hundred of them involved. We were dealing with "brain damage" resulting from years of ineffective information. The whole approach had to be more personal.

I felt that if classes were limited in size to around 20 and held continuously for a week, this would allow a relationship to develop that would ensure the students' comprehending the concepts required. As it developed, we ended up with 22 per class and still do it that way in all our operations, domestic and overseas. It has worked out well.

In the early days I taught all of the classes myself, but as the business began to grow, this became increasingly impractical. After developing course materials and a few videos, with the help of Bob Vincent I began to teach others how to conduct the courses. It takes about nine months to learn to handle a Management College course and longer for the Executive College. All courses have full-length filmed case histories now.

As my personal participation in the classes diminished, I began dropping in on each class for a period of "open discussion." The idea was to give participants a chance to ask whatever was on their minds and to smooth the way for the instructor by getting some things settled that might arise. Besides, I really enjoyed it. It was also very helpful to me in developing new material. This way, I could keep up with what the managers and executives on the front lines of business were thinking.

As the class load became higher, the college president diplomatically hinted that the question and answer periods were becoming a bottleneck and suggested another way. Now, the Winter Park classes all have lunch together and then gather in the auditorium for one big question and answer session. We also began to tape the sessions so that people at other PCA locations could share in what was being said in these open exchanges. Subsequently, it was decided to offer the tapes as a subscription set. The tapes are a way to bring anyone into the circle and to clarify for them the quality philosophy and methods. They let people know what I am really trying to say rather than what people think I am saying.

When I learned that surgery was going to put me on a short leash for a few weeks, I began to think about making a book out of some of the taped material from the question and answer sessions. It was good therapy. I learned a lot in the process, and the book is now at hand.

Whereas at first I thought such a book would be a simple matter of editing my remarks as they were on the tapes, I learned that the exact written transcript of a verbal presentation does not read well at all. Still I tried to keep with the original ideas expressed in the questions and to use many of the ideas contained in my original answers, although I have broadened my responses and in many cases have refined them.

The questions change over the years, but the majority

have been consistently oriented toward the concepts that underlie our philosophy of quality and toward specific problems experienced by participants of the Quality College in getting things going back home in their respective businesses.

The questions and answers selected for *Let's Talk Quality* fall quite naturally into five areas.

The first part, *The Way We Were*, serves as an introduction to all the rest and presents a picture of how far things had degenerated. These four questions and answers deal, in part, with the conditions and thinking that led to what might be called a "quality crisis." They represent a good starting point—and a basis for comparison—to show the directions we have tried to go, to show some of the false starts, and to set the stage for presenting the future agenda.

The *Quality Revolution* section contains questions and answers that deal with changes on the domestic and international scenes. It should not be surprising that much of this discussion deals with the Japanese, their competitive position, and their approach to quality as compared to that of the United States. Many of the questions relating to the domestic scene are concerned with the nation's largest, and therefore most visible, corporations. How the giants cope with quality issues is understandably a model for how other businesses will cope.

Part 3 on *Quality Thinking* consists of questions and answers that shed light on the quality improvement process itself and the thinking that underlies it. Ours is a changing, growing philosophy, but it is built on principles that remain stable. There is material here on the 4 Absolutes, the 14 Steps to quality implementation, the concept of zero defects, and the thinking behind the belief in total conformance to requirements. In addition, Part 3 deals with the relationship between quality concepts and implementation and with other quality and productivity approaches such as MBO and Just-In-Time. There are

questions dealing with subjects as all-encompassing as how organizations change and as detailed as inquiries about the hows and whys of filming *The Quality Man*.

The section on Quality Action makes clear that problems cannot be solved in an ivory tower. Philosophies must be executable, just as actions must be guided by philosophical principles. These questions and answers involve the problems that attend implementation. All businesses are different, and in this section you will hear from representatives of high tech, retail, and service businesses, of large businesses and small businesses, and from people in entrepreneurial situations, all posing tough questions about the nuts and bolts of quality implementation.

Finally, the fifth section, Quality Relationships, revolves around questions about quality as it relates to business culture. Business can be seen as a set of "people" relationships. Any attempt to change business must take into account the relationships between and among management, employees, suppliers, and customers, for they are all equal partners in the enterprise. Despite the best intentions, there is no denying that change generates anxiety, and the "company politics" that result can be woefully counterproductive.

I've concluded *Let's Talk Quality* with an epilogue that attempts to sum up where we've been, where we are, and where we want and need to be in the quality quest. The 96 questions and answers in *Let's Talk Quality* represent the beginning of the kind of "quality dialogue" that I see as essential to an ongoing quality improvement process. They are by no means all the concerns voiced, but only a selected sampling. You may think of other questions. If so, I invite you to commit them to paper and send them to me. Now, let's talk quality.

Philip B. Crosby
Winter Park, Florida

Contents

Preface vii

<i>Quality: The Way We Were</i>	1
<i>The Quality Revolution at Home and Abroad</i>	11
<i>Quality Thinking: Toward a Mature Philosophy of Quality</i>	43
<i>Quality Action: Toward a Workable Quality Process</i>	99
<i>Quality Relationships: Toward a Quality Business Culture</i>	137
<i>Epilogue: Quality Past, Present, and Future</i>	175
<i>Guidelines for Browsers</i>	183

Index 203

*Quality:
The
Way
We
Were*

Question 1

You've been quoted as saying that in the past five years you have learned more about the quality process than you had in the previous 25 years. What five areas on the quality front have seen the most dramatic change in the past five years?

Answer

I think everyone learns more in the past five years than in all the previous years in any field. But my exposure during that time has certainly been extensive. In quality I think I have learned more about several things.

First is implementing. We have learned how to teach companies how to do for themselves rather than doing it personally for them. Years ago, I used to go into an operation, figure out what the problem was, and then guide the company along. If you read Tennant company's book, *Quest for Quality*, you will see that the help I gave them was on a personal basis. We had no company then, no products, no tools, only our first management classes in the Quality College. I taught them the basics, gave them the benefit of my experience, and they carved their way through the jungle. If they had had available all the tools we have today, they could have flown over the jungle instead of walking through it.

Tennant had to educate all their people; we can now supply that. They had to go out and find or create tools; now these same tools are wrapped up in software and other media. It could have saved them a lot of time, money, and effort.

Second is attitude. Attitudes change when a business's culture or working environment is changed, not until. Getting people together and preaching to them, or "motivating" them, changes very little. A person has to experience the value of a new look at life. Even couples who live side by side can have vastly different attitudes about their apartment building, their marriage, and everything else, based entirely on their experience. When it is a pleasure to come to work be-

cause the requirements for quality are taken seriously and management is helpful, then attitudes change permanently.

Third is the CEO. When it comes to changing a company, I have learned that someone has to sit down and talk to the chief about the extent to which he or she understands the personal role in making quality happen. No one inside the company is going to do that successfully. It has to be an outside party. That's why someone senior in an organization like ours has to have a planned session with the CEO. Then we can tell them the truth.

Fourth is wellness. In my most recent book, *The Eternally Successful Organization*, I talk about causing "corporate wellness." The message is that there is no necessity for companies to have all the problems they have. They don't need to be subject to illness, but they do nothing to prevent it. So instead of just talking about prevention in terms of product or service or administrative problems, it is best to talk and think about it from a corporate standpoint. A corporation is like a person, and what happens in personal wellness is a great analogy for the business world. And this involves taking a holistic view of the body, whether it is the human body or the corporate body.

Fifth is witnessing. I learned, even though I had been preaching this for years, that when it comes to quality, the witness of management is more important than anything else. Teaching people, leading people, showing people, providing tools—everything loses meaning if employers, customers, and suppliers feel that management is not walking like they talk. Look around. If you'll notice, our associates here at the Quality College, for example, believe that their management is serious about a quality environment. Therefore, everyone pitches in to keep the place immaculate, and they are vitally concerned that visitors and students have an enjoyable time. Everything runs on time because we all want it to be that way.

That was a good question. It made me think of things in a way I had not done before.

Question 2

Are there not, in fact, some situations in which it is cheaper and more efficient in the long run to manufacture a product, monitor the results, and sample to get the ones that you want, rather than to slavishly attempt always to do things exactly right the first time?

Answer

The philosopher George Santayana once said, “Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” What you just described is the system that got us into a quality fix in the first place. People were making decisions like that all day long, and as a result the product completely lost its integrity. We never did learn how to develop processes with high yields and systems that were reliable.

Sampling, for instance, is based on having a homogeneous population. Then a randomly selected few represent the whole of the box, or barrel, or tub, or whatever. However, when repeatable processes are never established, then sampling itself becomes very chancy and unreliable. Now if a product is sampled and the sample is found to contain too many defectives, what happens? A bigger sample is taken, and so on and so on until the lot is sorted. However, if the sample passes, the lot is approved for the next step.

When management continually interferes with the work process by making value judgments based on assumptions of whether it is cheaper to do something this way or that, then the process never becomes mature. I have had a standard bet for years that I would pay \$100 cash to anyone who could prove to me that it was less expensive to do something wrong the first time. No one has ever collected. The notions you described are part of the mythology people pick up along the way as they learn management.

People should spend their time improving the quality process, rather than juggling it around to meet their feelings of

the day. Each step along the way needs to be continually examined to see if it can be done cheaper, quicker, more reliably. Don't set up false detours or special arrangements. Learn what right is and do it that way all the time. Then people will have something they can trust.

I had a car once that seemed to start only when it felt like it. It had an automatic choke which would not do its job on a regular basis. It was necessary for someone to open the hood and hold a little lever down while another person started the engine from the driver's seat. When the young lady I was dating told me she was not going to do that anymore, I reluctantly went to the garage to get it fixed. I knew it was going to cost a lot less than getting a more cooperative girlfriend. However, as it turned out, only a minor adjustment was involved and the mechanic enjoyed my predicament so much he didn't charge me.

When management encourages procedural Band-Aids, employees lose confidence in them and in the process. Don't outsmart yourself. Legitimate trade-offs are few and far between.

Question 3 _____

We often hear the phrase "planned obsolescence." How does your vision of quality improvement approach that concept?

Answer

This concept was developed by Raymond Lowrie back in the 1940s. It is misunderstood, like most concepts are when they begin. People think it means that the product is designed to fall apart the day after the warranty expires, or that it should only work to a minimum standard so the customer will get tired of it and buy into the succeeding generation.

What planned obsolescence really refers to is the practice of continually offering new and more attractive designs or per-

formance characteristics so consumers will yearn for the new model. They will want to go buy the latest attraction. From this thought, for example, came fins on automobiles. Indeed, most of the design alterations that we continually see on products, and services too for that matter, are the result of this idea.

The quality improvement process, as I conceive it, handles all of this well. We deal with change continually. Therefore, change should be a friend. It should happen by plan, not by accident.

For example, a couple of years ago, our company began an entirely new way of dealing with quality assurance, change control, internal auditing, and other appraisal systems. We call it *systems integrity*. This concept is introduced and explained in detail in *The Eternally Successful Organization*. Briefly, the idea is to make a friend of change by doing it on purpose in a way everyone knows about. At the same time, the systems integrity people are continuously examining the systems of the company to see if they are operating properly. They do all this appraisal without giving advice. That cuts out the business of having one group of experts that says what is okay and what is not okay.

Question 4

The concept of zero defects has actually been around for a long time. Why do you think it didn't catch on initially? Why it is just now coming into vogue?

Answer

There is a whole saga involved in the answer to that question. I will explain it as best I can with the background that good ideas based on solid concepts have a great deal of difficulty in being understood by those who make a living doing things the other way. Dr. Joseph Lister, for instance, who was the first