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Coaching to master your world

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What Does Quality Mean To You?

by Helen Ewing

When people were asked if they expected high quality in the goods and services they purchased, they overwhelmingly responded, of course. When further pressed, and informed that the highest quality would cost them more, a perception began to develop around price and quality. The higher priced the item was, the more it was expected that it would be of high quality. The lower priced the item was, the lower the expectation of quality. Sometimes, we trade price and quality in a very conscious way in order to save money. So what does quality really mean to you?

When evaluating suppliers of goods or services, price is not the only criterion nor should it be. There are more aspects to quality than just price alone. Price comes to mind first as an indication of the grade of components used in the product. If that is the assumption, then a supplier that has a better process who can offer a lower price compared to a similar supplier at a higher price, is assumed to be inferior. Obviously, a further investigation is called for. So what criterion completes the whole quality picture?

Suppliers that exceed customers expectations are ones who have multiple attributes. In addition to continuously improving their product superiority, they consistently improve their level of customer service. This means they resolve issues quickly such as product returns, fixing software problems and helping with training questions promptly. Conducting business with suppliers who are difficult to deal with are not quality suppliers. They cost their customers time and escalate frustration levels in trying to manage everyday business.

Suppliers who make internal process improvements and then pass along savings in the form of price decreases or enhancements are suppliers customers want to keep. Advancements in technology for equipment, materials and software offer opportunities for suppliers to impress customers. Suppliers who constantly seek improvements retain their current customers for longer periods of time while attracting new customers.

As you can see, there are many aspects of quality that add to the decision in determining which suppliers to keep. Suppliers who are proactive in the above areas will be able to keep their customer base happy even if they are not the lowest priced supplier in the pack. What are you willing to pay for?