

March 2021

RV PRO

RV-PRO.COM



IN-PERSON EXPO IMPRESSES

NTP-STAG's Expo gets high marks from vendors and attendees.



NBM INC.



A Conversation About

QUALITY PART 1

Just like the gross profit in the new unit deal lives between the desk manager's ears, quality from the shop lives in the tech's heart. That's where it lives and breathes. But it's not where it starts and finishes.

***Editor's note:** The following is the first part in a two-part series on RV service technicians and quality. Part II of the series will run in the upcoming April issue.*

Let's talk.

In more than 40 years of working with dealerships, I regularly find myself engaged in recurring conversations. Those conversations involve a handful of topics that persistently pop up.

An example would be the topic of scheduling technician time. In that case, the conversation quickly comes to an understanding that we lack technical capacity for the amount of work the market brings us.

Another of those perennial topics centers around quality. It usually takes the path where we need someone to check the quality, accuracy, or effectiveness of the work as it is completed by an RV technician.

I'd like to spend some time with you looking at typical solutions and effective strategies for that question. In another article next month, I'd like to address quality issues in a more global perspective.

Here's how the conversation usually starts: A dealer at a 20 Group meeting pulls me aside and says he's having trouble with the quality of work as finished in the shop. The next statement offers the solution of having a shop foreman or someone else in a similar role tasked with checking each and every job line on each and every work order line before the unit leaves the shop.

While the intentions are great, the course the dealer is proposing won't resolve the issue. This discussion usually ends with the ineffectiveness of the inspection process and the typical driving concern stems from issues with customer complaints.

As brief aside to these thoughts, I'd like to share the opinion that most dealerships



By Chuck Marzahn

Chuck Marzahn moderates virtual 20 Groups for RV dealers in the U.S. and Canada. He can be reached for comment and questions at Chuck@RV-VDG.com.

undervalue the role of both the salesperson and the technician. But of the tech, it is especially true.

Ironic, isn't it, that we have so much trouble finding techs – and place so little value on the ones we have? Could there be a connection there?

Why Inspection Doesn't Work

Techs can be a bit “special” when they are challenged regarding the quality of their work. Most of us would be, too. If the inspection is put in place to “catch” errors, the tech is predictably defensive. That can lead to responses that are the opposite of the desired result. A better solution comes with close examination of dealership culture and moving toward a goal that creates a win for all stakeholders.

The strategy of using a production manager or foreman to “enforce” quality can work – but usually doesn't. I've seen it work effectively in smaller shops. Let's say, eight or fewer techs. When it works, it's usually because the foreman has the respect of the techs and blame never rises much above a little good-natured teasing for an error in judgment or troubleshooting technique. The key is that it's about making things right rather than placing blame.

When you try to push quality through with inspection, you are likely going to

cause more problems than you find. General Motors learned that lesson the hard way.

Before the Japanese automakers became quality giants, GM used to inspect on the production line and mark up any discrepancies they found. The cars with problems were pulled out only after the end of the production line. Then the repairs were made.

They had, at the time, vast “re-work” floors covered with cars waiting on repairs. Imagine the losses from tying up that much inventory. Then consider that the problem with the weld in the driveline tunnel is now under the seats and under the carpet. The repair becomes more time-consuming and the chance of breaking something else during the repair is great.

Quality is Built in – Not Added On

The Japanese manufacturers learned to fix the problem on the line. In many cases, they would actually stop the production line to immediately find a solution to a problem. You may think stopping the line is a bit extreme, but consider the GM model.

While the car is marked up with a defect and moving down the line or waiting on the re-work floor, the problem in production hasn't been fixed and the line is still turning out units with the same built-in

WHERE HEAT MEETS COOL



When it comes to thermal management, for Eberspächer there is only one solution: the solution that fits you. We develop customized system solutions to meet every requirement and every need, using components from our heating, cooling and control portfolio to ensure pleasant, performance-enhancing temperatures in your vehicle interior – the whole year round.

www.eberspaecher-na.com

800-387-4800



A World of Comfort

“Techs can be a bit ‘special’ when they are challenged regarding the quality of their work. Most of us would be, too. If the inspection is put in place to ‘catch’ errors, the tech is predictably defensive. That can lead to responses that are opposite of the desired result.”





Quality springs from pride in one's work and from concern for the reputation of the individuals and the dealership concerned.

defect. Rather than pushing quality with inspections, the Japanese had learned to lead with a game-changing culture.

Those two examples illustrate the most effective way to impact quality output. It must start with a culture that desires to put quality at the top of outcomes. Inspection by itself won't do that.

I know of a dealership that put in a type of inspection process to enforce quality. The techs quietly rebelled. They'd huddle up and discuss how the inspector missed an item they had deliberately left undone. They justified that neglectful omission as a "test" of the process. When the test failed, they dismissed the whole process as ineffective and worthless.

See the problem here?

Where morals exist, laws aren't needed. Where no morals exist, laws do no good.

The techs see it as black and white. The polar, bifurcated worldview is part of the nature of techs that makes them good at what they do. They generally don't like gray areas. If it ain't right all the time, it ain't ever right.

Once Again, Mindset is Key

So, you can see that the tech mindset presents an opportunity to understand where quality lives and thrives. Just like the gross profit in the new unit deal lives between the desk manager's ears, quality from the shop lives in the tech's heart. That's where it lives and breathes. But it's not where it starts and finishes.

Good quality output starts with the service writer ... and ends

with the service writer. Here's what I mean by that: Remember my mentioning that the quality topic is rooted in concerns about customer satisfaction? My position is this: Quality begins and ends with the satisfaction of the customer. When a customer perceives their expectations have been met, they are satisfied. And the logical place to control those expectations begins and ends at the write-up desk.

I've often taught the main thing a service writer does is to understand the customer's concern so it can be conveyed accurately to the technician for correction. If the writer doesn't take time to properly gain that understanding, the tech will have no chance to fix the concern – much less of provide quality in the process. The understanding reached between the customer and the writer is foundational to all subsequent actions.

It is based on answering three questions every customer has:

1. What are you going to do?
2. What is it going to cost?
3. When will it be done?

Entering into and maintaining that understanding through the maintenance or repair process is critical, vital and cannot be neglected.

Your mind should quickly jump to the proper conclusion that if the writer has the best understanding of the customer's concern, they are most likely the best within the dealership to check if that concern has been addressed. So, they are also the last step in quality control. That's an interesting term that we'll revisit later.

The Best Scenario

Here is what you hope for in the writer's role: First, they have a clear understanding of the concern and can replicate it for the technician so the path for correction is abundantly clear. When the tech has confidence in the accuracy of the issue, the path to troubleshooting and repair is clearer. And when the tech explains the process of repair to the writer, the writer will naturally weigh the explanation of the repair against the understanding of the concern.

It is so often at this point that bells go off in the writer's mind if the explanation doesn't match the understanding of the customer's concern. That is the point at which to question if you have really addressed the concern. Thankfully, many of those explanations occur before the work is done and the timing gives you a chance to rethink or to be sure before approaching the customer with an estimate and course of repair.

What is "quality" after all? Do you have a good working definition? If you don't know what it is, how likely are you to find it?

It's more than a bit tricky to wrap your mind around. From *Quality Digest*, it is defined as the following: "Quality itself has been defined as fundamentally relational: 'Quality is the ongoing process of building and sustaining relationships by assessing, anticipating, and fulfilling stated and implied needs.' Even those quality definitions which are not expressly relational have an implicit relational character."

Get it?

Quality must be consistent in meeting relational expectations.

The biggest leaps in understanding quality were pioneered by W. Edwards Deming, author of "Out of the Crisis." Deming was commissioned by Gen. Douglas MacArthur following World War II to help Japan rebuild.

Here's the kicker: Deming was a statistician. He developed the interstate shipping rate charts we still use today. I recall he had something to do with setup of the way we take the U.S. Census.

He was concerned with refining processes to the point the outcomes could be rigidly controlled. His work largely centered on what became known as "statistical process control".

When we use the term "quality control", that's what we mean. We bring a process under control so the outcomes, results, or products can be relied upon to be at a consistent level. That's a lot to ponder. How it relates to the RV industry is coming in the next article.

For the purposes of the discussion on tech quality, this should be apparent: Consistent work in understanding customer concerns starts the process off. The tech with a clear understanding of the desired outcome can apply proven diagnostic and repair techniques that produce accurate and dependable results. Finally, the service writer's role is to cross-check the tech's story with the concern voiced by the customer.

In that model – and with the right mindset and culture – quality happens naturally. It springs from pride in one's work and from concern for the reputation of the individuals and the dealership concerned. No amount of inspection will produce results at that level. **RV**



PURE POWER BLUE With **BioBlastPlus™** Odor Control Technology

The most powerful RV tank treatment available

- High & Low Temperature Control
- Liquefies ALL Waste & Tissue
- Works in Black & Gray Tanks
- Leaves a Fresh Scent

VALTERRA® www.valterra.com   