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Using Research for Total Quality Management

An educated forecast can keep you on top

What does it really take to make TQM work effectively? The answer is research. Since the most important measurement of TQM is customer satisfaction, the ability to define core customers and satisfy them is critical.

Research commonly used in TQM includes market segmentation, measurement and trend analysis.

The first step in satisfying your customers is always to know exactly who they are. Segmenting your target market may involve obtaining demographic figures through media research companies, the census, or various other research firms. Once you know which customers you are trying to please, conduct surveys to find out what they want, what they like, and what bothers them about your product or service.

Post-transaction feedback is important in the measurement phase, perhaps the backbone of all businesses wanting to retain customers. Focus groups, questionnaires and interviews are all ways of finding out the perception of your company and its products, and whether or not you have achieved customer satisfaction.

Finally, trend analysis allows you to stay ahead of the game. Being aware of trends enables your company to plan for the future. You're less likely to be caught off guard, and you can schedule production ahead of time. Reading industry journals and trendtracking research journals are important. Predicting the future can never be a guarantee, but an educated forecast can keep you on top.

Asking for feedback: The key to TQM

- 96 percent of all unhappy customers never complain.
- 91 percent of those who complain won't come back.
- Each customer will tell, on average, nine to 10 others.
- You will get 82–95 percent of these customers back if you fix the problem. A well-handled problem usually breeds more loyalty than you had before the negative incident.

Source: Technical Assistance Research Programs, Washington, D.C.

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