

## PREPARE FOR YOUR QUALITY AUDIT

### SUMMARY

With quality becoming ever more important, more job shops are getting more and more quality audits by more and more customers. The quality audit can mean the difference between winning and losing important customers. If handled properly, it can be an important learning experience for your company, even if the audit turns up any deficiencies.

This BMA contains tips garnered from a variety of sources to help you prepare for a customer quality evaluation.

#### ESTABLISH AN OPEN AND COOPERATIVE ATTITUDE

A visit by a customer's audit team is not a hostile act. Don't treat the auditors as if they were the enemy. The audit team will probably want to talk to shop floor people and to middle managers. You should expect this and instruct your employees to be honest and open with the evaluators. A cooperative attitude may not add to your rating, but an uncooperative stance may suggest that you have something to hide.

#### REVIEW YOUR COMPANY'S ORGANIZATION CHART

The audit team is likely to ask for an organization chart. Do you have one? Is it current? Does it show clear responsibilities for various functions such as sales, engineering, purchasing, and so on?

#### REVIEW YOUR QUALITY MANUAL

The auditors will ask to see your quality manual. Their main concern is likely to be whether your system is clearly documented and defined. This does not mean that you need to have a fancy book on your quality system. You should be able to show that your system is reviewed and updated periodically.

The simplest test of an effective quality manual is whether it is used and understood on the shop floor. Do workers have their own copies, or have access to one? Simple statements of your procedures and a description of your record-keeping system will suffice for most small shops.

#### WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

Your quality documents should include a statement assigning responsibility for quality squarely with top management. Attempting to delegate too much of this responsibility downstream is likely to cost you points in your rating.

#### BE PREPARED FOR SPOT-CHECKS

When checking record-keeping systems, a quality inspector may ask to follow the paperwork trail of an entire job, from the raw material to shipment. Similar requests may be made for gage calibration records. If your system is sound, you should be able to withstand this scrutiny.

#### ASK YOUR CUSTOMER FOR EVALUATION CRITERIA BEFOREHAND

Find out if you are being evaluated to a particular specification (such as MIL-Q-9858A). Do a self-evaluation first and correct any weak areas. If your current system meets the customer's needs, stick to your guns and defend it on its own merits.

Also, there are a variety of situations that can prompt a customer's audit (see chart). Be sure you know the real reason for an audit and you will be better prepared to deal with it.

#### CONSIDER IT "FREE CONSULTING"

Sure, an audit takes up valuable time from you and your employees. But remember that you get the benefit of having a team of outside quality professionals scrutinize your operation. If you hired a team of consultants to do the same thing, it

would cost you thousands of dollars! Instead, your customer absorbs this expense, and you still get the benefit of the results.

**ACCEPT CRITICISM GRACIOUSLY**

OK, so the auditors found some deficiencies. Cheer up, nobody’s perfect. Chances are, any deficiencies found will be fairly minor and easy to correct. Even the American Society for Quality Control advises that you “... learn as much as you can, and take your lumps.”

If the auditors do not suggest or recommend specific corrective measures, suggest some of your own and gage their reactions. “Would you be satisfied if I did it this way?” Get as much feedback from the audit team as you can—and put it to work for you.

**CORRECT DEFICIENCIES PROMPTLY AND FOLLOW-UP**

Your customer may be specifically looking at the manner in which you respond to deficiencies found during the audit.

If your response is slow and half-hearted the customer may get the message that your work may be the same way.

Responding adequately and promptly gives you the opportunity to demonstrate how the corrective action portion of your quality system really works.

**DEMONSTRATE A CONTINUAL STRIVING FOR IMPROVEMENT**

There’s a Japanese buzzword for this, “KAIZEN.” The concept certainly isn’t new, but increasingly, the continual quest for improvement is seen as a key element in any company’s plan for success—whether in quality, productivity, or overall competitiveness. Instill this attitude throughout your company and you can’t go wrong.

**This BMA was prepared by NTMA's Technical Department.**

| <b>CUSTOMER QUALITY AUDITS</b>               |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Situation</b>                             | <b>Questions to be Answered</b>   |
| Evaluation of your company as a new supplier | Can you meet the customer’s needs?                                      |
| Evaluation as an existing supplier           | Can you continue to meet the customer’s current and future needs?       |
| Evaluation as a “problem” supplier           | Can anything be done to resolve the problem?                            |
| Evaluation of corrective action              | Was the problem really fixed? Is the corrective action system adequate? |

**Tooling and machining companies are likely to receive quality audit inspections by customers in any of the four situations shown above. Each presents different questions but each presents a learning opportunity as well.**