



Because excellence –in the end- is a personal journey.

Ladies and gentleman,

Let me ask you first to do something for me. Please take your diary -may it be electronic or paper -and open it on the day of tomorrow.

This is a peculiar situation for me. I am not used to having my presentation being presented by someone else. I cannot even be sure, if the text will be read at all. It is even more strange that my text is read by a stranger, my words are pronounced right now by someone who is willing – thanks by the way- to do this for me. This situation is even more peculiar since we are talking about *quality awareness*. There are many definitions of quality. You probably will know them all, people like Garvin (1984) and Reeves & Bednar taught us (1994). Crosby (1984) calls quality conformance to requirements. Juran (1988) says quality is fitness for use. In my opinion quality is in the interaction between the producer and the customer, the doctor and the patient, the teacher and the student. In the one and only quality novel “Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance” –if you have not read it yet, you should- Pirsig (1974) states: “Quality is not a thing, it is an event”. Quality is about what happens between you and the narrator, and somewhat more remote between you and me, right now. It is -as Harvey & Green (1983) said- transformation, it is the change that happens in you when you have the experience. Like ice that is transformed into water and eventually steam if it experiences an increase in temperature.

So how can I make this happen? How can we raise the awareness of people to deliver quality work? How can we make them to improve the interaction they are in? The last 25 years I have been working on this issue almost 24 hours a day. As a manager, as quality manager, as consultant and trainer in quality management, as an academic, as a husband and a father of two lovely kids. In my work I have been especially interested in raising quality awareness of professionals. I was interested in the willingness of professionals to cooperate with quality management programs. In my Ph.d thesis I studied a very specific species of professionals: the academic (like myself). I did a case study on the willingness of academics in Universities of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands and Flanders to contribute to accreditation, the certification system of higher education that is quite similar all of the world. Well, ladies and gentlemen, professionals do not want to be controlled, as you probably know. They prefer to control themselves. One step further: you cannot raise someone’s quality awareness, so stop trying to do so. You should raise your quality awareness yourself.

(I ask the narrator to pause a minute, because here, I would like you to take a break and write down in your diary at least one thing in your to do list for tomorrow that will improve the quality of your work).

Ladies and gentlemen, this is quality awareness. Like brushing your teeth, quality is a daily personal obligation. Because excellence –in the end- is a personal journey.

Thanks for your attention

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