



4 Obvious Indicators of Quality

Everything that leaves your organization should be exceptional in some way.

By Jean Van Rensselar

When we say that certain people have *quality* what we mean is that they demonstrate good taste, are well groomed, have impeccable manners, and accomplish all of this consistently---these traits are obvious. Not surprisingly, these same 4 traits that indicate obvious quality in a person also indicate quality in an organization that clients and prospects notice.

1. Good Taste

Think refinement and elegance. For a while, every lunch seminar I went to included sub sandwiches, little bags of potato chips, bottled water, and a big cookie in a cellophane wrapper. There is nothing tasteful about this. Not everyone wants a giant sandwich and a giant cookie. This isn't about expense; it's about consideration. A variety of smaller sandwiches on sandwich bread, cut up fruit, smaller cookies on a plate, and someone pouring water into iced cups would have cost the same (or less).

Another example is signage. Would you call your outdoor signage tasteful? You don't have to be obnoxious to grab attention. A couple of brightly colored balloons attached to a neatly lettered marquee announcing a sale is more effective than a half deflated 12-foot gorilla or a glum employee holding a sign.

Doing business with a refined company makes everyone feel better about themselves. And this isn't limited to high-end stores. I rarely go to Walmart, but when I do, I always leave feeling a little icky (for lack of a better word). On the other hand, I enjoy shopping at (and investing in) Target -- where they instill quality control into every aspect of the store. There's very little difference in price between the two stores, but there's a huge difference in the shopping experience.

2. Appearance

This is the physical face of your organization---apparent in advertising, marketing, and presentation materials, packaging, facilities, and personal grooming. Among the 4 aspects of quality this is one that most often falls through the cracks---downhill changes in appearance are often so incremental that employees and administrators don't notice.

For example, it takes a while to see the effects of a less than diligent cleaning crew. Over the course of a few weeks, more dirt will build up in the corners, dust will accumulate around the awards in the bookshelves, and the bottoms of the doors will start to look grimy. If you work there everyday, you won't notice these gradual changes, but your clients, prospects, and other visitors will.

Also, don't overlook ventilation. Most buildings have a unique smell. You want yours to have no smell. Mold, dust, carpet glue, stale food odors, and even air fresheners are not good. Clean, fresh air is very good (great air quality is another nice thing about Target).

Also, assuming that you have a dress code, how well are you enforcing it? Do you let things slide in order to avoid confrontation? For example, if you allow employees to wear polo shirts to work as long as they're tucked in, what about the employee who only tucks in the front of his polo shirt?

Any lapse in appearance, whether it's poor facility maintenance, sloppy dress, or misaligned advertising text, sends the message that this isn't an organization that cares about details.

3. Manners

This includes professionalism and consideration. Quality people and quality organizations treat everyone with respect. They learn and follow the rules of etiquette and they bend over backward to avoid offending anyone. Does your organization send handwritten thank-you notes? Brooks Brothers does and so do other organizations that want to maintain an aura of quality with a simple, inexpensive gesture.

People often think of organizational manners as the way companies treat their customers. But your customers are also very interested in the way you treat your employees. And guess what they really think of companies who stay open until 11 p.m. on Christmas Eve?

4. Consistency

Quality organizations accomplish the first 3 items consistently and they have measures in place to ensure that things continue that way into perpetuity. They have very specific dress codes, they have facility maintenance checklists, they have sales call follow-up protocol, they have guidelines for marketing materials, etc.

Any organization can launch a quality campaign for a few weeks or even a few months. But an organization that is truly a quality organization, has a long-term commitment to providing a first-rate experience for both customers and employees.

As far as the bottom line goes, consumers will only pay for value that they perceive. You need to make it your business to see that consumers perceive, not only the value in your products and services, but the value in your organization.

Make this your mantra:

Everything that leaves my company will be exceptional in some way.

About the Author

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