

Quality Hypocrisy

The Man in the Mirror

by Mike Micklewright



*"I'm starting with the man in the mirror,
I'm asking him to change his ways."
by Michael Jackson*

Question: What did the registrar auditor do after informing his client that he wasn't allowed to give advice?

Answer: He gave them advice.

I like to listen to Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror." Yeah, so what? I'm sure there are songs that you like to listen to but don't want others to know about. The only difference is that you're not dumb enough to inform 30,000 subscribers like I'm doing.

In my defense though, it is a really cool song, and it continually motivates me to improve who I am. What's wrong with that? Jackson sings the song with such conviction that as I sing the song along with him I can feel myself gritting my teeth and getting pumped up with the same conviction, until someone notices, and then I pretend there's food stuck in between my teeth, and I pick it out with a fingernail.

What's great about the song are the words and the conviction. I try to block out *who's* singing the song and what appears to be the hypocrisy between the words of the song and the singer himself. I love the lyric—

*"I'm starting with the man in the mirror.
I'm asking him to change his ways."*

To take responsibility for our actions, to hold ourselves more accountable, to practice what we preach—these are virtues for which we should all strive.

But Michael Jackson singing these words just doesn't seem right. So, I tell myself, "Self, don't be so judgmental, maybe you are not hearing the words correctly." To test my level of judgmental-ness, I slow the song down on my phonograph, and I do believe I misheard his words and what Michael is really singing is:

*"I'm starting with the man in the mirror
I'm asking him to change his face"*

Please be patient. I *am* getting to a point.

I was wrong. He wasn't being hypocritical at all. He *did* change his face. And now, he has *two* faces. He was only informing us of both of his faces, literally and figuratively. Now I can be proud once again of telling people I listen to Michael Jackson.

Two-faced quality companies

Do you know of two-faced companies or individuals? Do you know some that don't practice what they preach? Do you know of companies who use quality and lean to make money and don't live by their own principles? I'm talking about consultants and trainers, of which I'm both. I'm also talking about the companies who provide consulting, training, and auditing services in lean, Six Sigma, and ISO 9001.

None of us is perfect, but some of us display such blatant disregard for what we preach that I recognize the hypocrisy and say so. *Caveat emptor* in the quality industry.

Case study 1: Too much business?

One of my clients wants to schedule the services of a well-respected registrar. He has left several voicemail messages, and the registrar has not returned his phone calls. My client is now looking elsewhere. I have heard many stories of registrars,

once they have a client under contract, not returning phone calls to schedule surveillance audits. Have you? Is this customer service? What would Michael Jackson think?

Case study 2a: "I'm not a quality guy"

At a recent international conference on ISO 9001, lean, and Six Sigma, a panel of registrar top executives answered prepared questions. The president of one of the registrars stated that his clients were "Paying them for business advice" and openly admitted that he was "not a quality guy." No kidding. Is that why it's so easy to get and maintain certification? Can you imagine Bill Gates saying that he's not a "software guy" or Michael Dell stating that he's not a "computer guy"?

Case study 2b: Taking corrective action without knowing the root cause

At the same conference and discussion panel, a top executive of the ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board briefed the audience on the upcoming changes to ISO 9001 and ISO 9004, scheduled for release in 2008. He mainly talked about the larger, more involved changes to ISO 9004 and stated that ISO 9001 won't change much. He also spoke of the many hours that were being devoted to improving ISO 9004. During the question-and-answer session, I asked if ANAB or some other body had tried to determine the root cause of so many people not using or being unaware of ISO 9004, before putting so much time and effort into improving it. The ANAB representative's response was that four or five possible root causes had been discussed, but there was no agreement as to which were the true root causes. He further stated that if "ISO 9004 doesn't work this time, it might just go away. This is the last chance."

That's like putting a lot of effort into improving fax technology. How can standards professionals spend time and money on improving a product without understanding why so few people even *use* the product? Determining root cause is probably the most important part of improving a quality system, and ANAB, the organization that accredits the companies that certify *your* company, doesn't do root cause on its product. What would MJ think?

Case study 2c: You're not a customer unless you pay me

At the same conference, a top executive from a large lean Six Sigma company gave a keynote speech that many people complained about because she couldn't be heard easily, her slides were overly complex and too small to read, and she basically just read her slides to us. Isn't one of the first steps in Six Sigma to identify your customer's needs? WWMJT?

Case study 3: Is it wasteful if you sell more to the client than they need?

I occasionally subcontract my services to a large lean training organization. Three of us trainers recently provided a value-stream mapping (VSM) implementation service to one of the organization's clients. It was scheduled for five days, and the client had six attendees. The account manager for the organization was also present at the beginning of the session, so the ratio of client members to lean-organization members was 6:4. Is that awesome service, or is it an example of the waste we were teaching them to get rid of?

I tried to get information from the account manager weeks before the session regarding what he sold to the client, because five days were too many for VSM, especially for three trainers. I asked what our standard work was for the five-day session. He had no idea what I was talking about. Besides, it didn't matter—the client had already paid for the service. As it turned out, we were done in three days, and we manufactured a fourth day of value-added service. The client paid too much, but waste is only applicable to the client and not the lean organization that sells waste, right? WWMJT?

Case study 4: Auditor waste

I performed a time study on an auditor working for a reputable registrar. My client asked me to be present for the surveillance audit as insurance. The auditor was unaware of my doing a time study on her. Of the eight hours she was "auditing," three hours were value-added audit time and five hours were spent talking about the Cubs, the White Sox, the tollway system, babies, poison ivy, and Tiger Woods. Now, that's value added!

Case study 5: I'm a god!

The president of a large Six Sigma training and consulting company rewrote my very honest bio so that it could be sent to a prospective client of theirs. I had at that time subcontracted one day of work with this company, and they were looking to use more of my services with this new client. The president, whom I neither met nor talked to, wrote of me,

"Mike is one of (company name)'s most valued senior operational excellence professionals with nearly 20 years of experience. . . . During this time, Mike has coached executives, consulted to deployment champions, mentored Master Black Belts, and trained hundreds of Black Belts and Green Belts. Mike represents the best (company name) has to offer."

When I read this, I knew I was now officially a god. Although I passed the test to become an ASQ-certified Six Sigma Black Belt and have taught hundreds of people in DOE (design of experiments), SPC (statistical process control), teams, project management, QFD (quality function deployment), FMEA (failure mode and effects analysis, and any other TLA (three letter

acronym), I don't believe I ever consulted to a "deployment champion," mentored a Master Black Belt, or trained even one Green or Black Belt. Oh well, it looked good, and as long as he could sell more quality, he didn't care about the correctness of the information he used. "We" only teach it, "we" don't practice it. I wonder if the president of that company has ever said, "I'm not really a Six Sigma guy." WWMJT?

Point #1 of Deming's 14 points: Create constancy of purpose for improvement of product and service

What is the purpose of a registrar? Is it to make lots of money now and give the paying customer a certificate and as few nonconformities as possible in the short term? Does this not come at the expense of long-term business when companies finally realize that ISO 9001 isn't forcing them to become better and they drop their certificate? Deming wrote, "Problems of the future command first and foremost constancy of purpose and dedication to improvement of competitive position to keep the company alive and to provide jobs for their employees." From what I see, registrars, at the direction of executives who aren't "quality guys" may be committing slow suicide in the interest of short-term profits.

What does it say about a lean training organization that oversells man-days of training to the client? In essence, they get the client to pay for extra inventory, even though we tell them that inventory is evil. Lean training organizations do this to maximize short-term profits at the expense of long-term employment for their industry and employees. From what I see, many lean training organizations are run by people who aren't "lean people."

What does it say about Six Sigma companies and executives who falsify data and information for the sake of gaining short-term business, when Six Sigma teaches us to get to the truth of a matter through effective analysis of data? If Six Sigma salespeople claim that their clients achieve a high return on training investment dollars, and the claim is backed up by data, should you believe it because they work for a Six Sigma company? What does it say when a Six Sigma executive doesn't know the needs of the audience? Many Six Sigma companies seem to be run by people who aren't really "Six Sigma guys. "

Brass tacks

Let's face facts. Most companies representing quality and productivity aren't run by quality and productivity guys. They're run by guys who know how to make short-term money and please owners, shareholders, and Wall Street. There's no constancy of purpose. It's the American way.

How do quality and productivity companies start changing their ways instead of their faces? They need to be run by quality and productivity guys like you and me. We need to run those companies, but we oftentimes don't have the leadership capabilities and the financial background to run them successfully. We need to develop those skills. It's up to us to change our ways so that we can change the ways of the companies representing quality and productivity, through constancy of purpose, for the long term.

About the author

Mike Micklewright is president of [QualityQuest Inc.](#), a Chicago-based consulting, training and facilitation company specializing in lean, ISO 9001, ISO/TS 16949, Six Sigma, and their integration. Micklewright is an ASQ-certified Six Sigma Black Belt, quality auditor, quality engineer, and quality manager. He holds a degree in general engineering from the University of Illinois and has worked in design, manufacturing, and quality engineering for the Saturn Corp. of General Motors and SeaquistPerfect Dispensing. Micklewright is a sought-after speaker and has had many articles published. He also performs stand-up comedy in which he makes fun of the world of continual improvement and has developed, produced, acted in, and sells video training programs.