FINDING A BETTER WAY

“There is always a better way; it should be found.”

Joseph Juran

On 28 February 2008 Joseph Juran, a pioneer of the quality movement, died. He was 103-years old. While many of us may not be familiar with Mr. Juran he was very respected and popular among business leaders in Japan. He was the second American to bring and evangelize the gospel of quality there. The first American was the better-known W. Edwards Deming. Mr. Deming advanced statistical methods of quality control while Mr. Juran’s contributions were focused on management. His theory of quality-control management embraced three functions: planning, control and improvement.

Both Messrs. Deming and Juran had a major impact in helping Japan overcome poor quality perceptions regarding its products in the U.S. and abroad to earn a reputation for high quality. Mr. Juran was awarded Japan’s Second Order of the Sacred Treasure in 1981. This is the highest honor the Emperor of Japan bestows on foreigners.

He advocated a management-led culture of continuous quality improvement. Mr. Juran conducted weeklong retreats on quality management. Middle-level managers populated the retreats he conducted in America. Chief executives attended his retreats in Japan. Mr. Juran stressed that to realize success quality should not be treated as a limited project as it was in the U.S. but as an evolving process as it is in Japan.

Mr. Juran liked to use the slogan “There is always a better way; it should be found.” He believed that the costs associated with achieving higher levels of quality would pay for itself through fewer repairs and a better reputation. Japan Inc. was able to achieve both versus their U.S. and worldwide competition in such fields as electronics and automotives.

He also formulated the “Pareto principle” which he named after the 19th century Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto who noted that 20% of the population owned 80% of the property in Italy. Similarly, Mr. Juran observed that a small number of problems produce most quality complaints. This gave rise to his 80 – 20 rule, which postulates that 80% of a firm’s problems are the result of 20% of the causes.

Mr. Juran held and helped his clients reach a higher standard of performance. If we followed his theories, principles and practices we would be more likely to achieve marketing excellence.
BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

Here are some suggested actions based upon Mr. Juran’s quality process for management:

1. **Don’t settle. Find a better way.** Mr. Juran believed “there is always a better way.” Too often we settle for what we have and how we do things. This attitude of settling leads to the practice of “same old, same old” behavior and results. This settling and its resultant practice stymie progress. It subverts development and growth.

   Instead we must believe as Mr. Juran that there is always a better way. And it will be found. We must be on the lookout and use our creativity to find it before our competitors do. A good practice when faced with any opportunity or challenge is to diverge before converging. Organizations tend to converge on a course of action before they have identified all the potential actions and systematically assessed those options to determine the most productive. We have to resist converging before we have identified, understood and tested each.

2. **Build quality into the marketing function.** Quality is a process designed to elicit predictable results. Unfortunately marketing lacks processes. Bureaucracy “yes”; quality processes “no.” Therefore, the results are anything but predictable. Marketing plans are more like a work of fiction. Beyond the business numbers what goes into them are often devoid of reality. Yet all the other functional areas in the company are driven by process. R&D has the scientific process to guide product development. Manufacturing has a process to speed production and minimize waste. The sales force has a process to enhance the likelihood of making the sale. If it the norm for other functions, why then shouldn’t a quality process guide marketing?

   Mr. Juran’s model embraced planning, control and improvement. Another way to view this is to: a) make plans that clearly identify what one expects from a specific course of action; b) carefully monitor results (i.e., inspect for what you expect) and identify any variances and their causes; and c) adapt planned actions to get the desired results. There are many ways in which we can build quality into marketing such as using the Creative Brief ScoreCard, or the Brand Positioning Add-valuator, to ensure that the direction we are providing for our marketing communications and brand development is strategically appropriate and actionable. Another example is the use of the “tissue” meeting where the agency shares rough creative concepts for subsequent dialogue and development with the client – before proceeding to storyboards, print comps, viz-aids, etc. Another sound quality process for marketers is to dialogue with customers, and adapt, before launching, or committing to the development of, a specific action. We, at BDNI, utilize all these in our 10-step process for developing competitive brand positioning and leadership communications. The 10-step process is based upon global best practices and it’s practical to do.

3. **Seek continuous improvement.** The Japanese refer to this as kaizen. It is about never ever being completely satisfied but, instead, fine-tuning performance. It is the antitheses of the old adage “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it.” We are not suggesting changing something that’s working but making it work better through thoughtful, evolution forged through dialogue with customers and subsequent adaptation that proves effective in the
marketplace. It is about polishing performance to further enhance results. It has worked for the Japanese in the automotive industry it can work for us regardless of our industry or category.

The intent of kaizen can probably be summed-up in the key copy words for Lexus, “The relentless pursuit of perfection.” It is the never-ending efforts toward improvement. It runs counter to what many US corporations do and can be expected to intensify in this difficult economic environment – rationalize products and services. For example, the airline industry has been rationalizing services. We no longer receive pillows and, if you are flying in the back of the plane, we have to purchase our own meals. (There is no such thing as a “free lunch.”) Worse yet, as the media has alerted us recently, this rationalization of product and services has even lead to certain carriers to continue flying aircraft that have potential safety issues as opposed to taking them out of service for repair. (It took a couple of whistle blowers to reveal this issue.)

Practicing kaizen, or continuous improvement, is about evolving our way to perfection. It’s a practice that can help serve to keep us ahead of the competition. At the very least it can help immunize us against competitive inroads.

4. Pursue discontinuities too. Okay, kaizen is a sound practice for remaining competitive. But sole devotion to it could lead to marketing myopia. We should not be afraid nor refrain from thinking out-of-the box. This is Marketect thinking. It’s about getting customers to perceive the marketplace in a new way that favors our offering. Examples of Marketect thinking abound: Nokia pursuing fashion versus raw technology for its cell phones; Starbucks’ third place; Virgin Atlantic Airlines providing travel entertainment at a value; iTunes and iPod revolutionizing how we get and listen to music – to name just a few. The competitors that will hurt us the most are likely to be those who change the game. What can we do to change our game? Challenge assumptions, play war games, pursue brainstorming led by an outside facilitator are some practices that can lead to generating potential discontinuities. But before you launch test for predictable performance that rewards your brand with a favorable ROI.

5. Focus resources on what really matters. Improvements are essential to continued brand health and business performance. The improvements that will bring us the best ROI have to matter to our customers and have a powerful causal relationship to the business. In other words these improvements need to be relevant and meaningful to customers and potential customers. Just as we cannot pursue everyone we cannot (and should not!) do everything. We should keep in mind the Pareto principle that 20% of our customers, and 20% of our actions, generate 80% of our business results. It is up to us marketers to identify the 20% of business drivers and actions we need to focus our resources against. While we are at it we should also identify the 20% that needlessly consume 80% of our resources and energy and find a way to terminate them.

6. Develop thy self. While we are looking to improve the brand marketing efforts we should not forget the manager – YOU! We marketing managers should seek continuous improvement for ourselves and, maybe even, reinvent ourselves. We are the ones who are ultimately responsible for the brand’s and our personal success. In this age of sameness “how” we think provides us with a critical strategic advantage to win in the marketplace
for our brands, and ourselves. We need practical, productive tools. The competition is always going to be out to beat us. And competition is getting better. Certainly, in many categories and companies competition is getting more desperate. If you are doing the same things in the same way as you have for years you are leaving your brand and self vulnerable to competition. And, if your don’t have time to develop thy self your well will run dry, break down or just become less productive. Don’t let that happen. Your MBA is not your shield. It is a passport to further learning. But you have to choose to travel this journey. It is a lifelong journey borne by the spirit of kaizen.

There are many things one can do to find a better way for oneself such as gaining a mentor, reading, reflection and, even, continuing marketing management education. The BDNI Institute provides continuing marketing education programs designed to enhance competencies and marketplace performance. If you have not attended a BDNI Brand Positioning & Communication College program we hope you will consider doing so this year. It will provide you with the 10-step process, tools, principles and practices to enable your brand and you to be more competitive. We can arrange to customize a program for your company or you could attend our Open Brand Positioning & Communication College program scheduled for 13 – 15 May in Evanston, Illinois. Program specs and an agenda can be found in this our website www.bdn-intl.com along with participants’ assessments from this program.

There is always a better way. We can give thanks to Mr. Juran for bringing our attention to this. Now, we need to find it to set a higher standard of performance in achieving marketing and personal excellence.

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