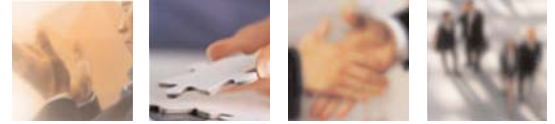


Point of View



Everyone Believes in Higher Quality

So Why Aren't They Buying?

By Jeri Smith, President and Founder, Galmont Consulting

Earlier this month, I was in Dallas to present at a regional meeting for the American Society for Quality. My job was to share with the 50-plus quality experts in attendance proven methods for selling quality initiatives outside of the technology organization. As always happens during discussions on this issue, one QA consultant pointed out the irony in the way businesses always speak about the importance of superior quality (quality products, quality services, quality customer care), but are often weak in their support of quality assurance initiatives.

For anyone who has worked in quality (or any area of IT for that matter) and had to sell a quality program to business colleagues, that irony can feel all too true. However, what I have learned during 15-plus years working in technology is this: Ideas and projects in the workplace need to be sold just as products and services are sold to a business. People need to be convinced of the value of quality initiatives before they will jump on the quality bandwagon.

What does that mean for QA professionals and IT leaders? It means that even though business development is not in your job description, selling is a part of your job. If you want to succeed and make a valuable business impact, you have to learn to sell big ideas and important initiatives to colleagues and managers.

In Dallas, I mapped out the conceptual selling ideas that are proven to help win over colleagues and senior executives in order to gain support for critical business, IT and quality initiatives. In the following text, I have outlined the four most critical lessons we at Galmont have learned when it comes to successfully selling quality within the business. It is my hope that you find these four lessons helpful as you work to increase the role, impact and value of quality assurance across your organization.

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Lesson 1: Establish Credibility/Arrive Informed

In any meeting where you are called upon to present and sell quality programs, it is critical to have done your background work on the attendees. Know their titles, which departments/teams they run and, if possible, what their critical challenges are in the upcoming year. Make sure that you have uncovered as much information about their needs as possible. If they know that you have done your homework, you will establish instant credibility.

Lesson 2: Listen

It is always important to follow the 80/20 rule when it comes to listening to your clients/colleagues. That is you listen 80% of the time and speak only 20%. Since quality programs are considered an intangible sale, you will more likely get emotional buy-in if your colleagues/clients see this as something that can help them do their job better. If you do all of the talking, you may never be able to establish common ground.

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Lesson 3: Mutually Decide on the Right Solution

Until a quality program is put into action, it is difficult to measure concrete results. For that reason, it is critical that you partner with your colleagues/clients to align the program and its goals. After all, they will be the best judge of project scope and objectives. If the program is built on mutually agreed upon considerations, you will have the greatest chance of success!

Lesson 4: Commit to Results

In any partnership, it is critical that both parties have clear and concrete action items that work toward a common goal. At the end of any meeting/presentation about your quality program, ask for a solid commitment to next steps. The commitment could be something as simple as introducing the program to executive-level decision makers or inviting you to present your program to another group of company stakeholders. The idea is that you commit to pushing the project forward and so do they.

Collaborate & Succeed

Any sales professional looking at the list above would agree that these four guidelines are strong techniques whether you are selling inside or outside of the business. They are effective however, not only because they are good sales techniques, but also because they are good business communication, partnering and collaboration techniques. When used with integrity and honesty, they will win lasting support for you, your projects and your entire quality assurance organization.

For more information on presenting or promoting quality programs and ideas, contact Jeri Smith directly at jerig@galmont.com.

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