

Quality

MANAGER'S ALERT™

The leading one-stop service to keep quality managers up-to-date in a fast-read format, twice a month

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MISTAKES THAT HURT

The consequences of substandard products can go beyond unhappy customers. Some companies wind up on the government's hit list and are forced into recalls; others self-report. In this feature, we list these and other quality mistakes.

Toxic when wet

- **Company:** Spin Master, Toronto.
- **Affected products:** Aqua Dots craft kits.
- **Reason:** Coating on beads contains chemical that turns toxic when wet. Two children who swallowed them slipped into comas before recovering.
- **Number recalled:** 4.2 million.
- **Agency contact:** Consumer Product Safety Commission, snipurl.com/aquadots

Consumers sickened

- **Company:** Del Ray Tortilleria, Inc., Chicago.
- **Affected products:** Tortillas.
- **Reason:** Consumers who ate them experienced vomiting, nausea and cramps.
- **Scope of recall:** Nationwide.
- **Agency contact:** Food and Drug Administration, snipurl.com/DelRayTortillas

■ Please turn to page 3

Quality and quantity: We cut rework, not productivity

■ Changing our approach made us faster and better

When our overseas competitors starting selling our product for far less than it took us to make it, we had two choices.

Either completely change how we did things – or go under. It was that bleak.

So we took a new approach to quality that ultimately set us completely apart from our competition.

Now we aren't just surviving, we're thriving.

Change was gonna come

Getting employees to accept the change was the first challenge.

This real-life success story was provided by Drew Greenblatt, President, Marlin Steel Wire Products, Baltimore.

Some had been doing things a certain way for 30 years and wanted to continue.

I gathered everyone together and urgently conveyed that there was only one path to success. Fortunately, most were up for the challenge.

From 300 at a time to 1

The biggest change we made was abandoning our batch mentality.

Our approach had always been to churn out as much product as we could, as fast as we could.

So, for example, we might've had 300 pieces sitting and waiting for the

(Please see Cut rework ... on p. 2)

Bad quality choices can seem good

■ It's instinctive – people think they've made the right choices

You probably already know that when employees make quality mistakes, focusing on the future works better than dwelling on the past.

Now we know why.

Recent studies show humans have a natural tendency to embrace the choices they've made, even when evidence suggests those choices were bad, or simply arbitrary.

And there's a sound reason.

With so many choices confronting us on a daily basis, we can't afford to waste time and energy worrying about

those we've already made.

That would distract us from the really important ones – such as how we're going to stay warm and where our next meal's coming from.

Let go of the past

So when an employee makes a bad quality choice, don't waste time telling him or her how bad it was.

A better approach: Do what it takes to help them make better choices the next time around.

Source: www.nytimes.com

Cut rework ...

(continued from p. 1)

next step in the assembly process.

Of course that meant if there was a problem with one piece, there was likely to be a problem with all 300.

Our new approach: a one-piece flow system. One person did his or her job, then handed off *one* piece to the next person.

Talk about an eye-opener!

People think checking each piece slows you down. We got faster.

How? By nearly eliminating waste.

We no longer had four or five people standing around staring at 300 defective pieces, saying, "What are we gonna do with this?" and, "Can we get these to within tolerance?"

Which was usually followed by an elaborate plan to tweak them. Which wasted even more time.

Bottom line: We started working smarter, not harder.

More layers of quality

To add another layer of quality, we made sure employees had all the tools they needed, and we empowered them.

All had plotter sheets that showed 1:1 top, front and side views of the products they were assembling.

They also had "go/no-go" fixtures to measure whether parts fit together properly. If they didn't, employees simply stopped production.

And we created quality incentive plans. If they came up with ways to improve quality or throughput, they earned cash bonuses.

Can't touch us

Now, we not only produce high-quality precision products our overseas competitors can't touch, we also turn both large and small orders around much faster than they can.

QUALITY BY THE BOOK

Drew Greenblatt, president of Marlin Steel, says two books changed the way he looked at and ran his company:

- "The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement" and
- "The Toyota Way."

Before we changed the way we did things, we were having to rework 30-40% of our products.

And that was taking close to 80% of our management time.

Now, even though the company engineers and executes 20-25 completely new jobs every week, rework is down to about 1%.

We've come a long way, but we're not done. We're still fanatical about finding new ways to get better.

The difference is, now we're enjoying the challenge.

Quality MANAGER'S ALERT™

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM BURGER
JBURGER@PBPCOM
MANAGING EDITOR: FRANK KREWDA
PRODUCTION EDITOR: KATIE REING
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR: PIETER VANBENNEKOM

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Sharpen your JUDGMENT

This feature provides a framework for decision making that helps keep you and your company out of trouble. It describes a recent legal conflict and lets you judge the outcome.

■ WAS COMPANY LIABLE FOR WOMAN'S EYE INJURY?

Kathy, the quality manager, was just about to get a third cup of coffee when the phone rang.

"I probably shouldn't drink any more anyway," she thought as she sat back down.

What she heard next gave her an even bigger jolt.

"We just got hit with a product liability lawsuit," said Sara, the company lawyer.

When Sara explained the case, Kathy was dumbfounded.

What the customer wanted

"I don't see how we could be considered responsible for the woman's eye injury," she said.

"We provide just one part of that whole mechanism, and we do everything according to the customer's specifications."

"Unfortunately," said Sara. "It was our part that hit her in the eye."

"And it was actually supposed to protect her," said Kathy.

"I know," said Sara. "Have we had problems like this before, to your knowledge?"

"Few, if any," said Kathy.

"They're saying there was a design defect," said Sara. "Could we have prevented this by altering the design? Did we try others?"

"Like I said," said Kathy. "Everything we did was according to the customer's specs. If anybody messed up, they did."

Kathy's company tried to have the case thrown out. Did it win?

■ Make your decision, then please turn to page 4 for the court's ruling.