



Quality management

for small businesses



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INTRODUCTION

'Quality management' is one of those big business phrases which often seems irrelevant to self-employed plumbers, cup-cake makers or corner shop owners. Small business owners are already busy. You had an idea, you put it into practice and now you're getting on with the job. You're working all hours and multi-tasking at a level that is mind-boggling to corporations like Microsoft or McDonalds, where every job that needs doing has specific people to do it.



JUST IMAGINE: you sell stuff on the Internet, it's just you with the occasional help of your brother when orders pile up

Making sure you've got stuff to sell: that's down to **you.**

Putting stuff on your website or eBay or wherever: that's down to **you** too.

Processing orders: **you.**

Getting the right orders sent to the right people, on time, and in good condition: yes, that's **you.**

Making sure the tax man doesn't start yelling: **you.**

Dealing with internet outages: **you.**

Paying the bills: **you.**



It's no wonder some things slip. It's no wonder you don't always get round to seeing how your customers are doing or whether you are giving them what they want. It's no wonder you put off chasing invoices so you actually get paid.

Doesn't it make sense to put something in place - a system - to make sure everything gets done and gets done right, every time, all the time?

All over the world businesses put in quality management systems and find they save time and money.

They make running things easier. They get them more work. Productivity increases. It doesn't matter if you work on your own or have hundreds of employees: a quality management system is just a system. Anyone can have one and anyone can benefit.

So, what is QUALITY MANAGEMENT?

It's making sure you keep your customers happy. And no matter what you do – electrician, dog-walker, jewellery-maker, masseuse – you've got to have customers to stay in business. It's also about making sure that whatever you do, you do it well every time. You provide a quality product. A quality service. Your customers trust you to do exactly what you say you will do.

Sole traders and small businesses rely heavily on word-of-mouth

recommendation and keeping a good reputation. Quality management is a way of actively making it happen rather than hoping hard work and long hours will be enough.

It doesn't need to be expensive or complicated or bog you down with paperwork. You don't need to spend thousands on a consultant or get a special certificate to benefit. Just understand the 'why' and then systematically work through the 'how'.

Your customers trust you to do exactly what you say you will do.



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WHERE TO START?

There are seven solid principles to quality management (set out in the international standard ISO 9000:2015 and quoted here, in italics) – once you've built all of them into your day-to-day activities life gets easier.

1 Customer focus

The primary focus of quality management is to meet customer requirements and to strive to exceed customer expectations.

Don't forget who keeps your business going: it's the customer. Don't take them for granted. Find out what they really want by talking to them. Ask them if they are satisfied with what you are providing. Ask them if you could be doing anything better for them. You won't always be able to – or want to – act on the feedback, but at least you'll know.

See 'One size does not fit all', Page 8

See 'Who cares?', Page 12

2 Leadership

Leaders at all levels establish unity of purpose and direction and create conditions in which people are engaged in achieving the organization's quality objectives.

You're the boss, it's your business, you decide: where you're going, how you'll get there and who's going with you. If you work with other people make sure they know what you want, what you want to achieve and by when.

See 'Have you got a plan?', Page 14

See 'Keeping an eye on things', Page 20

3 Engagement of people

Competent, empowered and engaged people at all levels throughout the organization are essential to enhance the organization's capability to create and deliver value.

If you work with other people involve them, trust them, bring them along. It doesn't matter whether it's family members informally clubbing together, an official partnership, full time employees or people on zero hours contracts. If you want your business to do well you all need to be pulling in the same direction.

See 'We need to talk', Page 16

See 'People matter', Page 18

4 Process approach

Consistent and predictable results are achieved more effectively and efficiently when activities are understood and managed as interrelated processes that function as a coherent system.

Don't muddle along or re-invent the wheel. Look at everything that needs to be done, work out how the different parts fit together and make a start to finish plan so that everything works. If you're baking bread it's not enough to just have all the ingredients. You follow a recipe. You use the right equipment. You time things. Business is just the same.

See 'Have you got a plan?', Page 14

See 'The never ending circle', Page 24

5 Improvement

Successful organizations have an on-going focus on improvement.

Don't assume that because you've always done things that way it's the best way forever. Products, services, premises, tools and equipment, suppliers - things change and move on. Keep your eyes wide open and spot opportunities to improve what you do; move with the times. Chances are things could get better.

See 'Bigger, better, faster, stronger, newer', Page 22



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6 Evidence-based decision making

Decisions based on the analysis and evaluation of data and information are more likely to produce desired results.

Don't always trust "gut feelings". Sometimes it's indigestion. Sometimes you just woke up in a bad mood. Talk to your staff and your customers. Take a look at the competition. Consider all of the evidence around you. In the end, what do the numbers tell you? They will probably lead you to the right decision.

See 'Keeping an eye on things', Page 20



7 Relationship management

For sustained success, organizations manage their relationships with relevant interested parties, such as providers.

We all know that if you're planning a big party the best way to avoid trouble is to tell the neighbours well in advance and preferably invite them along. If you don't, all sorts of things can go wrong. It's the same in business. Anyone who can affect your business needs your attention. Don't make false promises, don't try and hide things and don't ignore people. Communicate. Negotiate. Give respect to earn respect. Wherever you can, be nice. If you work hard at relationships, both sides benefit.

See 'We need to talk', Page 16

STRAIGHT TALKING

If you are thinking about putting a quality management system into your business there's a good chance you're going to Google to learn more. Don't let the results stop you before you start.

There is a world of jargon, acronyms, gurus and schemes out there using language that most normal people don't speak. Don't worry about it: it's not as hard as it seems.

The most widely used tool for putting in a quality management system is an international standard called BS EN ISO 9001. It sets out a framework, with requirements, that can be adapted to your own needs, no matter what type of business you've got. ISO 9001 is written in a sort of 'global' English which isn't always simple. This is because it is translated into lots of other languages. Sadly, plain English isn't one of them.

All of the official definitions can be found on the ISO website: <https://iss.isolutions.iso.org/obp/ui/>. There are thousands of definitions for thousands of standards,

however, so make things easier for yourself by clicking 'standards' on the welcome page and then entering 'ISO 9001:2015' into the search box. On the next page, click on 'terms and definitions' (on the left of the page) to see all of definitions relevant to quality management.

At the end of this guide are a few important terms, their official definitions and a simple explanation of what it means in practice.

See Page 26



ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Context is everything. Your situation is different to anyone else's in one way or another, and understanding all of the different things that can affect you is the key to getting quality management right. To be able to please your customers and reliably deliver what you say you are going to deliver, you have to know exactly who you are and how you fit into the world.

Take an imaginary village with a pub, a corner shop and a hardware shop. They all sit on the same road and they all depend on local residents for business, so they share some of the same challenges even though they are different types of businesses, being managed in different ways.

In the pub there are two full time manager/owners with an ever-changing team of young part-time staff. They've got to consider things like licensing laws, noise, seasonal surges and dips in trade. Every few years the river next to the pub floods, so they also have to plan for that.

The hardware shop has four experienced staff but three are near retirement. Their core business – selling screws, paint, gardening tools – isn't as good as it used to be, partly because of a nearby superstore. The staff know their regular customers well and take the time to chat and find out what they can do to help them, but these days less and less regulars come in. So the owner has a number of things to think about: how can the business survive in the face of big competition and changing shopping habits? What will happen when people retire if they can't find new staff? So the owner might consider moving the retail business online and offering more services. If he does, he won't need a shop nor so many full-time staff.

