# The Three Cs

In school people talk about the importance of the Three Rs – in business (to dramatically improve the Administrative function – and to a lesser, but still significant, degree to enhance the Marketing and Technical areas) people should be talking about (and implementing!) the Three Cs.

But first a picture; because a picture can be worth more than a thousand words! The following represents a comparison between the typical change in the quality of work over time (as employees come and go) compared to what is possible using continuous improvement principles and techniques.

Typical Change of Quality of Work	Continuous Improvement
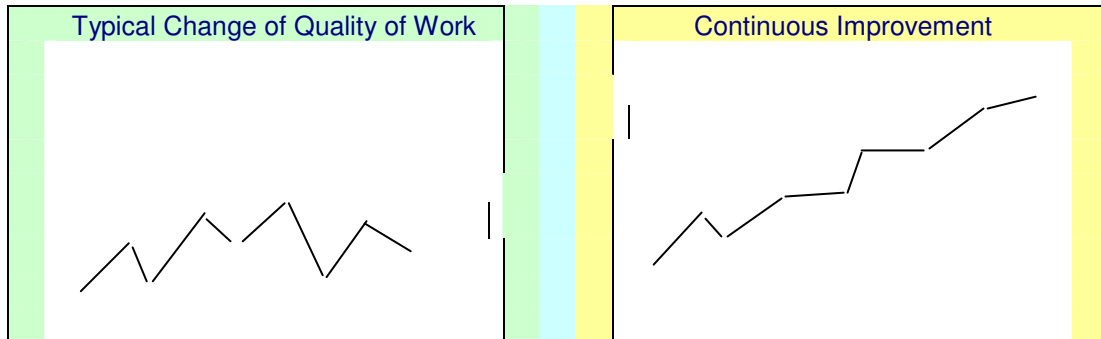
"But", someone may say, "big Companies have the expertise, time and money to learn and implement sophisticated methods and techniques – we are just a small Company!"

That's the good news – these procedures are MORE easily put into action in a small Company than a large one! In a small Company it takes ONE key person to implement continuous improvement procedures.

Whether a large or small Company, however, even good ideas are not going to be consistently used for long periods of time unless they are both simple and VERY beneficial. They are also not going to be employed by everyone unless, not using them, is obvious and quickly corrected.

The above model of the typical changes in the quality of work, over time, is undeniable – good employees leave (or move to new jobs within) a Company and are replaced. There is some level of training, but how can you replace months or years of experience? How can you hope to have better and better employees take the place of their predecessors? And as frustrating and costly is the training, retraining, re-explaining again and again and again . . . so most settle for the up and down quality of work, hoping nothing too big falls through the cracks!

The 3 Cs are easy and common-sense ways to mitigate most of these problems, providing a means to slowly but surely, year by year, improve the quality and efficiency of work. Employers obviously benefit as work is done right, but employees profit even more because, whether they stay or go, they are better trained!

How true the famous saying is (and how sadly unnecessary if the 3 Cs are in place):

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.
George Santayana, *The Life of Reason, Volume 1, 1905 US (Spanish-born) philosopher (1863 - 1952)*

Mistakes are made, time is wasted, employees are poorly trained, money lost . . .

A great instructive story, helpful equally in business and life, is found in the *Bible*:

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife.

She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said.

"By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing.

The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house.

Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy.

Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!"

So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. 2 Kings 5: 1 - 14

We see in this story the truth that:

- A big problem can have a simple and minor answer (99 times out of 100 they do!).
- Just because something initially may appear "too good to be true . . ." does not mean it is so. Many refuse to accept and implement a solution because they mistakenly equate reward with effort (big effort – big reward, little effort – little reward, "no pain – no gain") when, again, the two often have nothing to do with each other!
- "Little" people often see the solution better than the "big brains."

In most businesses the most significant problem not a lack of doing the big things, but failing to take the little steps of improvement. The Three Cs are significant examples for most small businesses.

C^1 – Calendars

Calendars are the "controllers" of the "whats." A failure to use calendars (the best is Microsoft's *Outlook*) is that:

- Important tasks are occasionally overlooked costing wasted time, penalties and avoidable problems.
- Training of new employees is a nightmare for both the trainer and trainee – "whats" are forgotten or require repeating again and again!
- When employees are out-of-work, for any period of time, it is more difficult for others to make sure the important "whats" are not overlooked.
- And, C^2 and C^3 cannot be easily or fully implemented.

Any good computer-based calendar system like *Outlook* allows you to input tasks on a recurring basis so that you only have to input the task one time. They also allow you to color code a new item with a level of importance – for example, red meaning it is critical it be completed on the date indicated. This is particularly vital if someone is unexpectedly out – every employee should have a designated backed-up so, if they are out, their calendar is reviewed for any critical tasks. And speaking of backups – it is critical all calendars be backed-up regularly so they are not lost – preferably to the network so they can be shared with other employees.

Calendars are simple ways to "dump" all the whats out of employees' minds while, in the process, ensuring they are BETTER remembered and completed. What boss has not been driven crazy because they have had to repeat something over and over and over again!

C² When you go to school in Accounting you hear "procedures manuals" so much you believe ALL companies certainly have procedures manuals! You believe this until you visit them and find out it simply isn't practical to develop and maintain procedures manuals! They are good in theory, but not realistic. The result is that most (especially small) companies largely "fly by the seat of their pants." They are desperate not to lose employees; they tend to "over-hire" to make sure a new employee can do a job. Not only do employees have to remember all the whats, they must remember all the "hows" of each task.

Some whats (for example, empty refrigerator) require no explanation, others (prepare and submit royalty reports) can be quite complex. C² – Checklists are helpful and simple tools to provide all the benefits of procedures manuals (and more since they are so simple) without the cost and expertise required to produce and maintain manuals.

Checklists are monumentally important when a new employee is being trained, while equally beneficial on an on-going basis to make sure tasks are being completed efficiently and are improving over time. How many people have a task they complete infrequently and find, from time to time, they forget critical steps, complete the work out of order, etc. so that, again, errors are made or time wasted – Checklists provide step-by-step simple documentation (that should be improved each time it is used) so that small continuous improvements are made.

As mentioned above, Checklists are even more noticeably important when training new employees or shifting tasks between existing employees. A "novice" may not understand a step on a Checklist, but at least they will know to ask someone about it! Checklists are a positive training tool for a Company, but even more for a new employee – new employees (and the bosses) do not have to be nearly as concerned that they forget something important; Checklists provide an excellent framework for both learning and completing tasks.

To alleviate the most common problem of Checklists not being used after a few weeks or months, wherever possible Checklists should be attached to or "follow" the associated work. For example, a *Royalty Report Preparation Checklist* should be attached to the completed royalty reports and checks submitted for signature – and each step of the Checklists should be initialed as completed – these simple steps will help keep Checklists "fresh."

Any item entered on a calendar with an * would indicate there is a Checklist to help complete this task – and these Checklists should be maintained in a central Word document "repository" or file folder to make sure they are available when needed.
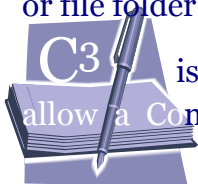
C³ is the natural consequence of implementing C1 and C2. Calendars and Checklists allow a Company to build off the past – rather than always reinventing it. They permit

employees and Managers to "dump" a multitude of whats and hows on paper, leaving room for C3 — Creativity.

There are a few people who are naturally creative – they can sit down and the creativity flows. For most, however, creativity comes in flashes – and unless caught at the "flash" point is probably lost. Who hasn't thought of something only to think, "I thought about this six months ago and then forgot it . . ."

So, the issue is not whether people have good ideas, it is how to make sure they are captured. And this is done simply by making sure people have (and are encouraged to use – think: motivated by recognition and reward) pads of paper and pens on their desk, in their car, by their beds, etc. Jotting down a thought, WHEN WE HAVE A THOUGHT, is the key to capturing the thought until we have time to analyze it, discuss it with others, etc. C3 — Creativity is best implemented by making sure you keep pads of paper everywhere (and then rewarding those who present creative ideas).

Taken together the 3 Cs are powerful yet simple tools to allow an organization to break the cycle of the typical change of quality for the continuous improvement model: