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You Must Produce and Do Quality Work

By *Harrison Barnes*

At Toyota's headquarters in Tokyo, one of the most striking things you see when you first enter is a collection of three pictures. The first is of Toyota's founder, the second is of Toyota's chairman, and the third, which is much larger than the other two is of W. Edwards Deming. The company believes Deming is the man whose teachings and philosophies made the company what it is today.

Deming taught the Japanese about quality and how to continuously improve quality. In fact, the success of modern Japan after World War II as an economic and industrial power is largely based on the Japanese march towards continuously improving their quality, versus the typical focus of American corporations:

1. Short-term profits
2. Mobility of management
3. Running a company on visible figures alone
4. Relying on technology to solve problems

Japanese goods used to be the laughing stock of the world in terms of their quality. Today, they are considered among the best, and the phrase "Made in Japan" is considered synonymous with quality. As the quality of Japan's goods has increased, so too has its standard of living and status in the world. The drive towards quality has served to elevate the country of Japan and its people. If quality can do this for a country, imagine what it can do for your career.

Incredible quality does not just change nations, it can change your life as well. The more you stress quality in your job, the better you will do in everything you attempt. You cannot avoid doing quality work and bringing improvement to your life. This is the lesson Deming brings to the way companies and countries are run, and your life.

The better you perform your job and the better the quality of your work, the more you will be valued by your employer. In addition, the more you concentrate on doing quality work, the more you will continuously improve. It is rare for people who produce the very best work and demand perfection to ever be out of a job or ever have a hard time finding a job. They get exceptional references from their previous employers, and current employers try to hold on to them, even in the worst economies. Producing quality work is something very rare and, because it is so rare, it is something that's valued in every marketplace all over the world.

We seek out and value the people who are the best at their jobs. The best employers want the people who produce the highest quality results to do work for them. When you produce quality work, you typically do not have to worry about job security, raises, or what other people are doing.

When I started practicing law with my first firm, I found myself working 15+ hours per day, seven days a week. I was not working this hard because I thought it necessary. In fact, many of the people I was working with at the firm had the same amount of work I did. I was working so hard because I knew the work I was doing could always be better. I knew I could make the same point in fewer words in a document I was writing. I knew I could make a more persuasive argument by finding better support for it. I knew I could stay a little bit longer and make something the best it possibly could be. I gave my all. The great thing about my continuous quest for quality is, the better I did, the more the most important attorneys at my firm started having me do all their work. In addition, I continued to get better and better at what I did.

I will never forget when I quit working at my first firm and decided to go to work for another. For several hours the most important partners in the firm, one after another, came into my office and tried to convince me to stay. At the time I did not know they rarely, if ever, did this when someone was leaving the firm. After the third day of this, I asked one of the younger partners why they were trying so hard to get me to stay.

"We want you to stay because you do really good work and you care about what you are doing," he told me. "You also continue to get better and better and show incredible promise as a litigator."

I was young at the time and those words sort of went in one ear and out the other; however, I remembered them years later when I started to employ people and observe their work ethic. I realized the effort I had been putting in was something quite rare. It is one thing to simply work hard at what you are doing and another to make your job your passion and set out to continuously improve.

A year or so later, when I wanted to come back to that firm, I asked the head of the firm if I could return to work. He said "yes" right away. For various reasons, this did not work out, but the fact is the good work I had done made an impression on the head of this firm and on the people in it.

In your job the most important thing you can do is make an incredible effort and do the best possible quality of work. When you do the best work you can, you are behaving like a professional, like someone who makes a difference in your company or firm. Your co-workers will also respect you more. You have employment security and, even if the firm you are working for goes away, your employer and co-workers will always recommend you to others. It is a wonderful thing to be known for the quality of your work.

Following World War II, the Japanese Union of Scientists and Engineers invited Deming to come to Japan and give a series of lectures on how management could improve quality. The Japanese told Deming they would follow his instructions. Deming predicted within five years Japan would be competitive economically, and consumers all over the world would be demanding the products the Japanese produced. The Japanese followed Deming's suggestions and, within eighteen months of

Deming's first lecture, saw huge strides in both the quality of their goods and productivity.

I predict if you start doing everything you can to improve the quality of your work, in less than a year you will start getting promoted and find yourself in a different place than you are today. People who do good work are management, CEO or high-earner material. All you need to do in order to really advance your career and life is improve the quality of your work. Once you do this, everything else quickly falls into place.

When Deming initially arrived in Japan after World War II, Japan's goods were considered shoddy and cheap throughout the world. They were made from the cheapest of materials. They were among the worst products in the world. Today, their goods are considered the envy of the world, whether the products are electronics, cameras, automobiles, or computers.

For American and European firms that used to control the world in these fields, the transformation brought about by Deming's philosophies has been nothing short of catastrophic. In the electronics industry, for example, nearly all components – such as computer chips, transistors, and semiconductor chips – were American inventions. The Japanese advanced so quickly in this field by the 1980s most American television and radio manufacturers were gone, and they rushed to Washington begging for help. The same thing happened with the American automobile industry; as the Japanese gained market share, American companies rushed to Washington and elsewhere asking for help.

In my studies of Deming, one of the things that stands out for me is a video of him made shortly before he died in 1993. In the video he offers the words, "It's all about the quality." Everything is about the quality. Think about how much different America would be today if we had the same quality of goods the Japanese produced. We do not make the same quality of goods because our emphasis is on other things, such as short-term profits. If our emphasis was on quality, everything else would be falling into place.

Deming's philosophies are quite simple. He believed organizations must create ever improving products and services. The more the product or service improves, the more loyal the customers of the business become. Loyal customers will brag to others about the product or service they are receiving and create new customers. Profits from a sale to a loyal customer are often six to eight times the profits from another customer. The company with the most loyal customers typically has much higher profits than the average company.

The results of ever-improving quality are profound. For example, if you are an attorney, you make your writing better and more persuasive. If you are a manufacturer, you make your product better. You never stop questioning and improving to make your product as good as it can be. According to a famous account of Deming's work:

Dr. Deming's teachings and philosophy can be seen through the results they produced when they were adopted by the Japanese, as the following example shows: Ford Motor Company was simultaneously manufacturing a car model with transmissions made in Japan and the United States. Soon after the car model was on the market, Ford customers were requesting the model with the Japanese transmission over the USA-made transmission, and they were willing to wait for the Japanese model. As both transmissions were made to the same specifications, Ford engineers could not understand the customer preference for the model with the Japanese transmission. It delivered smoother performance with a lower defect rate. Finally, Ford engineers decided to take apart the two different transmissions. The American-made car parts were all within specified tolerance levels. On the other hand, the Japanese car parts had much closer tolerances than the USA-made parts-i.e., if a part was supposed to be one foot long, plus or minus 1/8 of an inch, then the Japanese parts were within 1/16 of an inch. This made the Japanese cars run more smoothly and customers experienced fewer problems. (From Dr. Deming by Rafael Aguayo, pages 40 & 41.)

According to Deming, as quality is increased, costs decrease. This sets in motion the following reaction:

1. Better quality leads to higher productivity and lower costs
2. The firm with lower costs can pass along the savings to consumers in the form of lower prices
3. When a firm has lower prices and better quality, customers are happier
4. The firm captures market share and hires more people
5. The firm stays in business and grows its market share

Under Deming's philosophy, when you improve the quality of what you are doing, everything simply gets better and this happens rapidly. What does this mean for you?

I believe one of the most fundamental and important lessons in the development of a country and an economic power come from the experience of Japan. I believe the philosophies of Deming are profound and can make a major and important difference in your life and career. The more you work on the quality of what you are doing, the better you, too, will get and the better your career will get.

When looking at employers, you should also concentrate on working for those whose quality is getting better and better. Employers who strive to create outstanding quality are the same ones likely to be around tomorrow. The better the quality of the product the business is producing, the more opportunities they are likely to have in the future for you. The better the quality of your work, the more opportunities you are also likely to have in the future. Make quality your first priority.