



## Monday Matters

### August 12, 2013

#### Let's Swim With The Fish!

Dr. W. Edwards Demming developed a concept many years ago called PDCA or Plan, Do, Check, Act. It was from this concept that the term "Quality Circles" was derived. A quality circle is a volunteer group composed of workers (or even students), usually under the leadership of their supervisor (or an elected team leader) who are trained to identify, analyze and solve work-related problems. They then present their solutions to management in order to improve the performance of an organization, and motivate and enrich the work of employees. They meet on company time, are trained in the concept of quality circles and are generally free to select any topic to improve the quality of work produced.

Quality Circles were first established in Japan in 1962. The auto industry in Japan made significant strides in improving quality of automobiles during this time and a major



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**Quote of the Week**

reason was that workers were involved in solving problems through Quality Circles with management accepting their findings. The workers were on the front line and could see issues more clearly than people sitting in offices. As a result, Japanese cars are extremely good sellers in the U.S.

It was during this time that I had become involved with establishing Quality Circles in the service industry here in the states and learned the value of the concepts to help improve work flow and safety issues. So when I saw an article in a Church Central Leadership Community about a similar concept, I was intrigued. It was called "Swimming With The Fish" by Bob Russell, retired pastor from Southeast Christian Church.



Bob Russell sited a successful president of a company who keeps a fish bowl on his desk to remind him that most leaders are guilty of "four wall thinking" while they should be "swimming with the fish". He said leaders will sit in a comfortable conference room and make decisions about what's good for their employees and customers. He gave an example where leaders shared ideas on reducing order-to-delivery time for the company. It was suggested what they were doing was "four wall thinking" and in reality the employees, the ones doing the manual labor, knew what was better than anyone else. The company reduced their production time by 60% simply by getting in with the fish and swimming with them. The president says that after seeing life from the fish's perspective, leaders will make better decisions 90% of the time.

This concept is very similar to Quality Circles. While these ideas can work in the

" The best decisions come when leaders jump into the bowl and swim with the fish before making their decisions."

~ Bob Russell ~

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**Destressin'**  
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business world, where else can they be implemented? Bob Russell asked why not the church? He said that often leaders in a church are guilty of "four wall thinking". As an example, youth leaders sit in a room and plan a youth retreat and after the retreat that same group evaluates how it went. He said, "Wouldn't it be wiser if the staff gathered a focus group of teens and their parents to ask them what was effective and could be done to improve the following year's retreat?"

What would worship be like if worship leaders welcomed feedback from the congregation instead of "four wall thinking"? This same concept could be used for all programs in the church. I remember the pastors in our church asked the congregation to go out to the foyer after church and write on a board provided what they felt was the most important thing in their family. From the responses, the pastors preached a series of sermons over the next several weeks.

So, whether it be in the business world or in the church world, sometimes removing ourselves from "four wall thinking" and "swimming with the fish" can produce amazing results. Whether management personnel or church leaders, we are there to serve the employees, the customers, the congregation. As Bob Russell said at the end of his article, "The results are usually so unifying and beneficial that wise leaders know they can't afford NOT to jump in the water."

Let's go "swimming with the fish".

By Ron Nelson



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