

What is quality? Ask your customers.

Understanding and meeting your customers' requirements makes up the foundation of a quality plan

By Jim Peduto

Do you use the word “quality” when describing your business? Can you prove it? How do you assure customers that your organization is positioned to deliver quality services? Having a quality system in place is a must. But no matter how simple or complex, the quality system must be built around the customer. The system is a framework that includes defining customer requirements, implementing a quality plan, measuring performance, obtaining customer feedback and committing to continuous improvement.

Obtain key requirements

Quality is often defined simply as “meeting or exceeding customer requirements.” Therefore, defining the requirements is an essential first step.

For each customer, you should have a site-specific written scope of work or performance outcome that defines the customer’s expectations for the facility. The document should include tasks and frequencies and a description of how the customer defines clean. It might be necessary to meet with other stakeholders within the organization to better define expectations.

Write a quality plan

Once you know what customers expect, you then can start building a quality plan. This plan will help determine whether or not cleaning service requirements are met. It will also help identify improvement opportunities. The quality plan accurately describes the level of service defined by the customer, scope of work, implementation plan and performance outcomes. In short, it describes how to get from Point A to Point B.

Measure performance and gather feedback

The next step is measuring what is spelled out in the plan. The measurement system does not need to be complex. It can include surveys, inspections, records of complaints and customer evaluations. Maintaining a constant cycle of customer feedback helps consistently gather and track positive and negative results. It should also help you proactively identify opportunities for and drive continuous improvement.

Evaluate progress and commit to improvement

Analyzing performance results and determining whether or not your organization is delivering the service that the customer expects is fundamental to the delivery of quality service. Upon review of results, put together a written corrective action plan that describes how your organization will measure, report and implement improvements.

Redefine quality

The customer is at the center of every component within a quality system. The customer provides key requirements, drives the quality plan, supplies relevant feedback and

determines areas for improvement. It is the customer that ensures that your business is positioned to deliver quality services. Next time you mention the word “quality,” you better be asking your customers “what does quality mean to you?”

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