

TITLE: "CRAFTSMANSHIP: its Cultural and Managerial Implications "

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Since 1971: *"Software for the finest computer - the Mind"*

"Craftsmanship = (Knowledge + Experience + Attitude) X Success"
- Bryce's Law

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this essay is to review the state of craftsmanship in the 21st century, determine if it still has merit in today's corporate culture, and if so, devise recommendations for perpetuating it.

Background

Although there are no definitive numbers to prove so, there is a general consensus that craftsmanship has been in decline in North America since the 1980's. This era marked the beginning of stiff worldwide competition in just about every industrial sector, led predominantly by Japan and Germany. Since then, the European community has been unified and become a formidable foe, as has the rest of Asia. In response, American corporations began a policy of belt-tightening, downsizing, outsourcing, and use of new technology (e.g., robotics) all of which played an important part in the decline of labor unions during this period. This also led to the implementation of several corporate cost-cutting measures, including the reduction of employee education/training. In-house training and schools to develop employee skills were sharply curtailed, if not eliminated completely. Consequently, this led to a noticeable decline in human skills and a change in attitude by employees towards their work, thereby becoming more apathetic. It could be argued this also led to an increase in defects in workmanship which triggered the interest in Quality Assurance concepts and techniques beginning in the 1980's.

Today, the prevailing attitude in the workplace appears to be less focused on what is to be produced, and more on the time needed to produce it. In other words, employees are more focused on their paycheck as opposed to their work product. Undoubtedly this has contributed

to the current trend of micromanagement (a Theory X dictatorial style of management).

As such, an interesting dichotomy has emerged between management and workers:

- Management - believes there is no employee loyalty, dedication or professionalism.
- Employees - lack faith in management's judgment and are suspicious of business ethics. Believes management is more concerned with the bottom-line as opposed to people.

Whereas micromanagement is the dominant style of management in today's workplace, workers generally want more freedom and participation in the decision making process. But instead of worker empowerment, there is more of an inclination by management to dominate and more closely supervise workers. This growing rift between management and workers, along with changes in corporate socioeconomic conditions, has led to the decline in craftsmanship.

In the decades prior to the 1980's, craftsmanship flourished primarily because workmen were well trained, they were empowered to perform their work accordingly, and the work produced was considered a reflection of the worker's personal character. But if continuous employee improvement is discouraged (such as the reduction or elimination of employee training), self-initiative is prohibited (through micromanagement), and there is a general lack of trust between management and workers, then the decline of craftsmanship was inevitable.

The term "craftsmanship" is still bandied about, but more for marketing purposes than anything else. Most of the true craftsmen of this country have long since retired, but there are still a few practicing their craft either at home or in small-to-medium sized businesses where it is appreciated.

Why the interest in craftsmanship now? Due to heightened awareness by the media in such things as fashion, food, and architecture, there appears to be a growing trend in prestige consumer products. The fact that companies advertise their products are produced with "high craftsmanship" is indicative the consumer appreciates superior work products. There is also a growing realization that superior goods will last longer.

(continued on page 2)

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CRAFTSMANSHIP DEFINED

Before we go further, let's examine what exactly we mean by the term "craftsmanship":

"The practice and pursuit of excellence in building/delivering superior work products by workers."

This implies craftsmanship is a universally applicable concept for any field of endeavor, be it producing a product or delivering a service. Basically, it is a commitment to excellence which is most definitely not the same as quality. Quality simply relates to the absence of errors or defects in the finished product or service. In other words, finished goods operate according to their specifications (customers get precisely what they ordered). Although quality is certainly an element of craftsmanship, the emphasis on "superior work products" means the worker wants to go beyond the status quo and is constantly looking for new and imaginative ways to produce superior results. This suggests the craftsman is personally involved with the work products and treats them as an extension of his/her life.

Craftsmanship can be found in either the overall work process or a section of it. For example, there are craftsmen who are intimate with all facets of building furniture, such as a table, a chair or desk, and can develop the product from start to finish. However, as products grow in complexity, it becomes difficult to find people suitably qualified to build them from the womb to the tomb. Consider military weapons alone, such as the complicated ships, tanks, and airplanes we now use, with thousands or millions of parts to assemble. Such complexity makes it virtually impossible for a single person to have the expertise to build the whole product. The same is true in the service sector where different types of expertise and capabilities may be required. In other words, craftsmen have a specific scope of work. The scope of work may relate to other types of craftsmen through a chain of work dependencies, e.g., Craftsmen A, B and C concentrate on separate subassemblies which are eventually joined into a single product.

Craftsmanship is also a human trait. Some might argue a computer or industrial robot can produce quality products and are, therefore, craftsmen. However, we must remember these devices are programmed by human beings in accordance with the rules of the craftsman. As such, they are nothing more than a tool of the craftsman.

ATTRIBUTES

Craftsmen can be characterized by a variety of adjectives, such as: patient, determined, curious, thorough, expert, methodical, focused, self-starter, and pays attention to detail. More specifically though, craftsmanship requires the use of:

- **TOOLS** - In addition to the hand, the foot, and the eye, craftsmen must be knowledgeable in the use of other mechanical devices for his/her area of specialty.
- **THE MIND** - Requiring specific knowledge, experience and judgment to implement the work product. This brings up an important point: education alone is not sufficient to be recognized as a craftsman; it also includes a record of proven success to demonstrate the worker knows how to apply the education.

In terms of education, there are two parts to consider: initial education, either learned through formal training (e.g., college and vocational school diplomas) or through on-the-job experience ("School of Hard Knocks"), and; continuous improvement, representing ongoing training/education through such things as certification, supplemental training, studying industry periodicals and books, or participation in industry trade groups. Although initial education is certainly important, continuous improvement is the earmark of a craftsman.

The craftsman is knowledgeable in all facets of the methodology for his/her line of work. For our purposes here, a methodology refers to "Who" is to perform "What," "When," "Where," "Why," and "How" (aka "5W+H"). As such, the craftsman must be fully cognizant of the work breakdown structure, the dependencies between steps, deliverables, along with the various techniques and tools used throughout the methodology. From this, he/she can devise a reliable estimate of the costs needed to produce the work product, as well as schedule the time to deliver it.

A true craftsman is so knowledgeable about the work product and the methodology to produce it he/she can even advise other professionals in how to modify/improve them, such as architects and engineers (including industrial engineers).

- **THE SPIRIT** - This represents the personal desire to not only see the job performed correctly, but better than others. This means the craftsman is personally committed to producing superior work products simply because

(continued on page 3)

(continued from page 2)

he/she views his/her professional life as an extension of his/her personal life. As such, the craftsman must be empowered to make certain decisions on how to build/deliver the work product in order to achieve a sense of ownership. From this perspective, techniques such as micromanagement is not conducive for encouraging a program of craftsmanship.

A craftsman sweats over the smallest details in producing the work product and is well aware of the risks involved with skipping steps or doing something out of sequence. Such commitment to producing superior results suggests the craftsman possesses a higher work ethic than others, and in all likelihood possesses higher moral values due to his/her fastidious attention to "Right and Wrong."

To summarize, the elements of craftsmanship can perhaps be best expressed using the following formula:

$$\text{Craftsmanship} = (\text{Knowledge} + \text{Experience} + \text{Attitude}) \times \text{Success}$$

Knowledge - refers to both the person's initial and ongoing education.

Experience - refers to the person's application of his/her knowledge.

Attitude - refers to the person's sense of professionalism and dedication to his/her craft.

Success - refers to both customer and company satisfaction of the person's work.

WHO IS AFFECTED BY CRAFTSMANSHIP?

There are three interrelated parties involved with craftsmanship:

1. The Worker - charged with producing the work product.
2. The Company - which provides for a program of craftsmanship.
3. The Consumer - to purchase and express satisfaction with the work product.

Without any one of these elements, craftsmanship breaks down. For example:

- It is not sufficient for a worker to simply want to be a craftsman; if the company implements an unsuitable corporate culture, craftsmanship will not be allowed.

- It is not sufficient for the company to simply want to promote craftsmanship; if workers do not exhibit self-initiative to produce superior results, craftsmanship will not flourish. After all, "You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

- It is not sufficient for the consumer to simply say they want products built by craftsman; they must create the demand for such products and offer feedback in terms of their satisfaction with them.

IMPLEMENTING CRAFTSMANSHIP

To embrace craftsmanship, a company must devise a suitable corporate culture. This includes the following elements:

- **EMPOWERMENT OF THE WORKER** to make certain decisions regarding development of the work product. This is often described as managing from the "bottom-up" as opposed to just "top-down" which is conducive to a Theory Y form of management philosophy. Under this scenario, the worker is given assignments by management and is held accountable for delivery. In turn, decisions regarding the development of the work product are delegated to the worker who is responsible for the preparation of an estimate and schedule to deliver the work product for approval by management. In other words, the worker is allowed more freedom to manage his/her own affairs and is not under the constant scrutiny of management. Further, the worker is allowed to offer feedback to management for improving products and work conditions. Last but not least, workers are recognized for outstanding achievement.

- **CREATION OF A MORE DISCIPLINED AND ORGANIZED WORK ENVIRONMENT** promoting a more professional attitude amongst the workers. Ideally, the creation of an environment where workers can focus on their work with minimal distractions and take pleasure in coming to work (a sort of "home away from home"). Inevitably, this will include a redefinition of acceptable forms of dress and behavior, grooming, form of address, and office appearance.

This also includes a corporate position of zero tolerance in defects and inferior workmanship and the adoption of standard methodologies thereby defining best practices

(continued on page 4)

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for building/delivering work products. Such standardization provides consistency in deliverables and allows for the inter-changeability of workers on different assignments. For example, suppose a worker becomes ill in the middle of an assignment and is unable to work on it further. Standard methodologies provides the means to allow another worker to complete the assignment in the same manner as the first worker. Also, standard methodologies provides an excellent training vehicle for young workers to learn and grow to become craftsmen.

- **PROMOTE A PROGRAM OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT** to sharpen worker skills, stay abreast of industrial developments, and seek new ways of improving work products and the methodologies used to produce them. This will undoubtedly result in the reintroduction of in-house training and schools, as well as participation in certification programs and trade groups.

- **ESTABLISHMENT OF THREE CLASSES OF WORKERS** to denote the level of expertise. Historically, this has been referred to as "Apprentices" (novices requiring training), "Intermediate" (educated and experienced, but not yet expert), and "Master" (expert craftsman). Such a designation of craftsmen is needed not to create barriers but to help establish a career path and mentoring program whereby the more experienced workers provide guidance to those less experienced or knowledgeable.

- **ESTABLISH LINK BETWEEN WORKERS-PRODUCTS-CUSTOMERS** to establish a feedback loop to judge satisfaction with a specific product and to the exact worker(s) who produced it. It is impossible to recognize or reprimand workers without such a loop. For example, without it, customers may complain or compliment the company on the work product, yet management is at a loss as to who produced it. Ideally, a system should be set in place to provide for such analysis thereby providing a convenient means to monitor worker performance.

The premise behind affecting the corporate culture in this regards is to treat workers like professionals who should act as such in return.

BENEFITS & BYPRODUCTS

From a corporate viewpoint, is true craftsmanship the right path to follow? Does it really add value to the corporate bottom-line or not? First, it is a myth that work products produced by craftsmen costs more than those produced by less skilled workers. For products of the same class, it actually costs more to produce products using less skilled

workers; after all, they do not have the same level of knowledge and experience that veteran craftsman have to produce it and, as such, craftsman can produce it faster with fewer mistakes. The cost for an experienced craftsman will undoubtedly be higher than novice workers, but savings will be realized simply by expedited development time and fewer mistakes (thereby causing the elimination of corrections or replacements). Further, superior work products have the added nuance of developing satisfied customers representing repetitive business as well as referrals.

Comparing the development cost of different classes of products is like comparing apples and oranges, it is simply not an accurate comparison. For example, the cost to build a luxury automobile will be substantially different than the cost to develop an economical subcompact. But if the product is of the same fundamental class, the craftsman will produce it faster and better than the novice (and at less cost).

Some of the byproducts realized from embracing a corporate program of craftsmanship includes:

- A work environment more conducive for building superior work products.
- Employees develop a better sense of self-worth which promotes loyalty, dedication, and professionalism.
- Standard methodologies promote consistent and measurable work products, the inter-changeability of workers on assignments (as opposed to developing dependencies on individual worker expertise), provides a career path for younger workers, and brings order out of chaos. Also, standard practices improves communications, thereby promoting cooperation and teamwork.

CONCLUSION

A program of true craftsmanship adds value primarily to three parties:

- The customer - Satisfaction with the product means the consumer believes his money was well spent and takes pride in it, thereby encouraging others to purchase the same, thereby benefiting the company.
- The worker - believes he/she is leading a worthy and meaningful life, thus promoting self-esteem and employee development.

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- The company - receives fewer customer complaints and returned products that are defective requiring replacement or rework. Workers who take pleasure in their work are less likely to switch jobs thereby causing production interruptions. Harmony in the workplace also promotes improved communications, teamwork and corporate loyalty. In other words, craftsmanship adds to the bottom-line of a business.

But make no mistake, the consumer is the impetus for craftsmanship. As long as customers accept inferior workmanship without complaint, companies will continue to produce shoddy work products in the least expensive means possible and workers will not be allowed to produce superior products.

The outcry for craftsmanship must begin with the customer.

If you would like to discuss this with me in more depth, please do not hesitate to send me an e-mail.

Keep the faith.

END

NOTES

1 - The author wants to acknowledge and thank Mario Guertin of Painting in Partnership for his generous input.

2 - In an Internet survey conducted in December 2007, random people were asked,
"In your opinion, do you believe Craftsmanship in general is in decline in North America?"

- YES - Craftsmanship is in decline., 25 votes, 81.00%
- NO - Craftsmanship is not in decline., 6 votes, 19.00%

REFERENCE

1 - Craftsmanship: the Meaning of Life by Tim Bryce
"PRIDE" Special Subjects Bulletin #6, January 10, 2005

About the Author

Tim Bryce is the Managing Director of M. Bryce & Associates (MBA) of Palm Harbor, Florida and has 30 years of experience in the field of Information Resource Management (IRM). He is available for lecturing, training and consulting on an international basis.

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They are also available through the "PRIDE Methodologies for IRM Discussion Group" at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mbapride/>

You are welcome to join this group if you are so inclined.

The "Management Visions" Internet audio broadcast is available at:

<http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/mv.htm>

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