

Leading the Duck at Mission Control



Wainwright Industries shows what it takes to win a Baldrige Award.

by
Les Landes

IF IT LOOKS LIKE A DUCK, WALKS LIKE A DUCK, and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck. Right? Not necessarily. At Wainwright Industries of St. Peters, MO—one of the three 1994 winners of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award—it also could be a spiritual leader or a goose.

That might seem like an odd bit of silliness for a company that manufactures high-precision stampings and assemblies and other technical products and services for the automobile and aerospace industries. But for this enterprise of 275 associates (i.e., employees) with annual sales of \$30 million, it's very serious business, especially for Don Wainwright, chairman and chief executive officer, and his brother, Nelson Wainwright, president.

The duck being referred to is the company mascot, a two-foot-tall stuffed white duck with a light-blue blazer and matching cap. "You have to understand that this company runs on emotion," said Mike Simms, plant manager for Wainwright Industries' St. Louis, MO, operation. "The duck symbolizes a lot of things for us, mostly the passion behind what we do. Too many companies focus on the tools and techniques. That's how we started, and we failed. The duck is sort of a spiritual leader, a constant reminder of what's really important about quality."

"We discovered that quality ultimately comes from the heart," said Don Wainwright.

There is another symbolic connection between the feathered mascot and the company's strategies. "When you're hunting ducks," explained Don Wainwright, "you can't aim directly at them if you want to hit them. You have to lead them, anticipating where they'll be when the shot reaches them. That's what we try to do with our company: anticipate where the market is heading. That's why you hear people talk about leading the duck around here."

What about the goose connection? When geese fly in their characteristic "V" formation, the flapping motion of each member of the flock creates an aerodynamic lift for the bird immediately behind. When the lead bird tires, it falls back and

another one moves up to take its place at the point. This collaborative effort increases the flying range of the geese by at least 70% over what it would be if they flew alone or in random formation.

"Everyone here knows that story," said Simms. "It's an important emotional lesson about teamwork, and our duck doubles as a goose to symbolize that idea for us."

Mission Control: Where the "heart" meets the "head"

For all of its fervent and poetic emphasis on the "heart," the company's "head" is clearly focused on a rigorous set of measurements and processes that weave every aspect of its operations together in a network of carefully placed connections. The nexus of that tightly woven web is what Don Wainwright calls Mission Control. "When we applied for the Missouri Quality Award last year, we realized we had a tremendous amount of information, but we couldn't deploy it in a very clear, concise, and coordinated way," he said. "So we created a visual scheme for displaying the information that allows anyone to walk in and take the pulse of the company in a heartbeat."

The walls of Mission Control look like a cross between a carnival tent and an auditor's retreat. Most of the room is covered with red and green pennants (mostly green ones) and status reports and charts on all major customers. Green flags mean everything is on target. Red ones mean there is a performance shortfall.

Under each customer's name is a monthly report card that displays the grade—A, B, C, or D—that the customer has given Wainwright Industries for that month on each of four key performance measures: communication, delivery, quality, and responsiveness. The grades are then translated into numerical equivalents: A = 100, B = 90, C = 50, and D = 0.

Monthly data also are plotted on a progress chart. "The short-term results aren't as important as the trend," said Don Wainwright. "We want the results, but we emphasize the long view. Culture

About TQM

We believe that the term total quality management (TQM), along with similar concepts and phrases, actually hindered the progress of our improvement efforts, so today we have no definition for TQM. We try to avoid any type of quality jargon in referring to the way we operate. Instead, we say we are engaged in an ongoing journey of continuous, measurable improvement championed by responsible individuals at all levels of the organization. Our leadership philosophy inspires teamwork and a sincere trust and belief in people, which results in an enjoyable, productive workplace dedicated to the highest possible level of customer satisfaction.

takes time to change, so if the trend lines are sloping in the right direction, we know the results will follow. That's really the essence of continuous improvement."

A grade of B or lower requires a corrective action plan within 24 hours. It starts with a meeting that includes management and the customer team, including the person who is responsible for that particular customer. At the meeting, the participants analyze the problem and determine who in the company is best equipped to work on it. Together, they then move into action to resolve the problem.

"The other main feature of Mission Control is the display of data on the five key indicators used by the company to measure the company's overall performance:

1. Safety. Safety is at the top of the list for several reasons. Concern about the well-being of the associates is important, but Wainwright Industries has found that the intense scrutiny of safety creates a mind-set for improvement that carries over into other aspects of its operations. In addition, associates are naturally interested in that process because there is a direct, personal payback for their efforts.

When there is an accident, it triggers an extraordinary series of responses to make sure that everyone in the company knows about it and learns from it. Within 24 hours, a management team meets to discuss the incident and launch an investigation. The first step is for someone in the training department to conduct a video reenactment of the accident. The person involved in the incident plays the lead role, narrating what happened and discussing root causes and corrective action. A week later, the tape is shown to all associates so that they can eliminate the potential for a similar accident in their own areas.

Wainwright Industries' safety record speaks for itself: It has produced a ninefold reduction in workers' compensation claims during the past three years. That performance has earned the company safety awards from the Liberty Mutual Insurance Company and the Missouri Division of Workers' Compensation.

2. Internal Customer Satisfaction Index (ICSI). Associates measure their own level of satisfaction with each other's performance on a quarterly basis. The same criteria are used to measure external customer satisfaction and internal customer satisfaction. This ensures consistency throughout the customer satisfaction process.

The ICSI is also used to gauge the effectiveness of internal communication. "This whole process has really opened my eyes to the pivotal importance of communication," said Don Wainwright. "In fact, I used to see people talking and wonder why they weren't working. Now I see them talking and I think, 'Thank God they're communicating.' It's a pretty simple equa-

tion: The more we share, the more we grow."

3. External customer satisfaction index (ECI). The data from the monthly report cards and trend charts of all customers are compiled into a single number each month and displayed to show the overall customer satisfaction level. Currently, the ECI is about 95%. The goal for 1995 is 98%.

4. Six-sigma quality. The product defect rate is another key measurement area. Internal and external defect rates are measured in parts per million (PPM), with a long-term external goal of six sigma (3.4 PPM).¹ The external PPM with some customers is already exceeding that goal. One customer, for example, has received more than 20 million parts during the past three years without a single defect.

5. Business performance. Here's where the bottom line gets measured. Its position at the end of the list of indicators is not accidental. The company believes that if the first four indicators are on target, business results will follow. It does not, however, take that performance for granted. It is measured continuously to ensure the financial picture is healthy.

"I used to see people talking and wonder why they weren't working. Now I see them talking and I think, 'Thank God they're communicating.'"

—Don Wainwright

One of Wainwright Industries' key business performance measures is gross margins, which has improved by 35% in the last three years. Other measures include debt reduction, market share, sales, net income, and synchronous organization.

Synchronous organization refers to a systematic process for minimizing waste and improving business processes. In place since 1991, its goal is to control costs by controlling waste.

"We are driving this process throughout every part of the organization, not just manufacturing," said Chuck Donaldson, plant manager for Wainwright Industries' operations in Grand Prairie, TX. "We're working on production, distribution, service, administration—really everywhere in the company where we see an opportunity to reduce waste of any kind."

Based on a model used by one of its main customers, General Motors, Wainwright Industries has identified nine key areas for waste reduction: overproduction, overstock, transportation, processing, waiting, quality defects, equipment, space utilization, and specification requirements. The goal for 1995 is to have 83% of the company's sales synchronized through the waste reduction system; in 1994, it was 68%. "It's one more way we can ensure that the customer is getting the best product at the lowest price," said Donaldson.

Linking performance appraisals to the customer

Few people like the traditional performance appraisal process. The appraiser doesn't like doing it, the appraisee doesn't like getting it, and the company doesn't get much value from it. In part, that's because the performance appraisal is usually based on management's impressions, which are unavoidably subjective and sometimes not closely related to issues that matter to customers.

"We don't have performance appraisals anymore, at least not in the way that people typically view them," said Simms. "We have individual development plans for each associate, and those

plans are based on what the customer is telling us, not what a manager thinks about someone's performance."

Associates' "appraisals" are linked to the data compiled in Mission Control. Everyone's performance—from the owners to the punch press operators—is reviewed every six months based on the company's aforementioned five key performance indicators.

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of the Wainwright model for the performance appraisal is that it is directly linked to customer evaluations, company goals, and individual performance. As such, management's impressions are virtually eliminated from the performance appraisal.

The Wainwright model requires that performance appraisals and salary reviews be conducted independently of one another. In addition, unlike most appraisal systems, neither ratings nor comparative adjectives are used. "No one is ranked or rated on a scale of one to seven, for example, or told they are excellent, good, average, or poor," said Don Wainwright. "We simply look for performance gaps, and then we identify one area where the associate can improve during the next six months."

Creating the continuous improvement culture

Most top-performing companies boast an impressive record of employee suggestions implemented throughout their organizations, but Wainwright Industries' performance is truly world class. In 1994, associates *implemented* (not just submitted) more than 8,400 improvement ideas, which they call CIPs, an acronym for continuous improvement process.

"We try to make it very easy and attractive for employees to continuously look for ways to make improvements," said Don Wainwright. "First, all associates know that they own their ideas and that they're responsible for implementing them. They have to document their improvements. Supervisors have to sign off on them, but that is just a formality to make sure that there are no serious problems with them. Supervisors rarely turn one down, and if they do, the associate has an appeal process he or she can initiate instantly."

In addition to the ease of getting an improvement implemented, the reward and recognition system offers another reason to participate in the process. "We don't require anybody to submit CIPs," said Simms, "and no one's performance is downgraded if he or she doesn't, but the person does miss out on some very attractive incentives."

"There are no negative repercussions for making a wrong decision....People won't get fired, chewed out, or called on the carpet."

—Nelson Wainwright

Every time an associate submits a CIP, his or her name gets entered into a weekly computerized random drawing. If a team submits a CIP, all team members get their names entered. The winner of the drawing gets an \$80 gift certificate for whatever they want, such as dinner for two at a restaurant, tickets for a symphony or baseball game, or groceries. "No cash awards, though," said Don Wainwright. "Money just doesn't create the kind of feeling we get with personalized rewards."

For a safety CIP, associates get their names entered three times into the drawing. "Safety is where we want people to

focus their attention most, so that's where we place the greatest incentive," said Simms. "If you want to change the culture in a particular way, you have to make sure that the reward structure supports it. The minute we let up on safety, we pay the price." As evidence, the company has done correlation studies and found that when the ratio of safety CIPs drops below 10% of the overall total, they usually have an accident within a month after the decline.

Every other week, there is also a department drawing. To qualify, the department must have met the minimum requirement of 1.25 CIPs per associate per week—the current company goal. The winning department gets two highly prized awards: a \$500 deposit into the department's account to use on internal improvements as it sees fit and the honor of keeping the company mascot in the department until the next department drawing.

Some departments have amassed several thousand dollars in their accounts, using them for such improvements as personal computers. "The associates could just come to us and ask for the computers," said Don Wainwright, "but this way they feel like it's their money. They earned it, and they can spend it any way they want, as long as it's for some type of internal improvement."

The company also has quarterly drawings for a \$300 gift certificate along with catered luncheons for everyone who has submitted a CIP during that period. The grand prize at the end of the year is a highly motivating \$1,000 gift certificate to the person who wins the drawing, as long as he or she has met the quota of 1.25 CIPs per week.

Here's the clincher of Wainwright Industries' incentive process: It is run entirely by the associates without any management involvement. "We set up an annual budget through the human resources department," said Don Wainwright, "and the associates decide what to do with it. They even decide whether the budget for incentives is going to be increased. In fact, they just did that recently. That's fine with us because the results have been fantastic. But most important, it helps promote the initiative for continuous improvement."

Optimizing the system through training

The trust and belief that the company places in the CIP system is not based on blind faith. An essential ingredient in its success is the extensive training provided by the company for all associates. "People who believe you can have effective continuous improvement without intensive continuous training and development are just fooling themselves," said Don Wainwright.

A commonly accepted investment standard for world-class commitment to training is 5% of payroll; at Wainwright Industries, that number was at 5.8% in 1994. "I believe it takes three key things to promote ownership in an organization: focus, involvement, and optimization," said Don Wainwright. "Focus on the customer, involve employees, and optimize the overall system by maintaining a high level of training. Emotion may be at the core of everything we do, but without skills, motivation won't get the job done."

The types of training the company provides include statistical process control, synchronous organization, communication and interpersonal skills, technical training, and even basic math and reading skills. In fact, in 1991, the company conducted what it called a "locator test" to determine where everyone stood on

The Journey to Trust and Belief: 1979-1994

Wainwright Industries' quality record is built from a comprehensive set of strategies and tactics woven throughout the enterprise. But it was not always that way.

The company was founded in 1947, initially producing components for internal combustion engines. The move to expand the business began in 1979. That's when second-generation family members Don Wainwright, chairman and chief executive officer, and his brother, Nelson Wainwright, president, decided to build a new plant and diversify into new business areas.

"The timing couldn't have been worse," said Don Wainwright. "We based our business projections on what we thought was the worst-case scenario. But we didn't anticipate one of the worst recessions in history, and no one imagined how much the domestic automobile market would suffer."

In 1980, only one year after moving into their new plant, annual sales dipped from \$5 million to \$3 million. Operations were down to three days a week, and a large portion of the work force was laid off. The brothers feared they might have to close the doors, but they had a plan and managed to keep the business afloat. Shortly after that, a series of events was set in motion that would change Wainwright Industries forever and for the better.

The journey that eventually led to winning the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award has been marked by a number of key turning points, but three significant emotional events—as Don Wainwright calls them—stand out.

Event No. 1: "These parts aren't flat." (1981)

"We were called to a meeting in Detroit with General Motors [GM]," recalled Don Wainwright. "GM told us that they were losing market share and they had to change the way they were doing things. They challenged us to apply statistical process control and to stop production when bad parts began to show up."

The company's determination to follow GM's challenge came to an abrupt halt one day when St. Louis plant manager Mike Simms, who was then a quality manager, came to management and said, "These parts aren't flat."

"We all just looked at each other," Don Wainwright recalled. "I said, 'What do you mean? We've been making those parts for 25 years. The customer has always taken them that way. What do you mean they're not flat? Ship them.'"

Simms responded, "I thought we were committed to quality around here."

Simms' initiative marked a major crossroad for the organization. "We decided not to ship the parts," said Don Wainwright. "Instead, we reworked them. When you see the costs involved in a decision like that, you seriously question the whole thing. But when your reject rate goes down, you begin to appreciate the value."

"That's when you understand that you don't improve quality just to improve quality," added David Robbins, chief operating officer. "You improve quality so you can lower cost. That means lower prices for a better product, and that's one of the main reasons we're succeeding with our customers."

As evidence of that success, Wainwright Industries was one of six companies supplying piston inserts to the domestic automobile industry in 1979. Today, it is the only one.

Event No. 2: "We wanted to build trust." (1984)

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, tensions between the company and its associates were running high. "We decided that this kind of relationship was not in the best long-term interest of

the company," said Robbins. "We set out to actively open communication, build bridges, and bury hatchets. We wanted to build trust."

Management's efforts led to reduced tensions over the next few years. In 1984, several key events occurred to significantly improve the nature of the relationship between management and associates.

"First, we started calling people associates instead of employees," said Robbins. "Then we made some substantive changes. To reflect the new relationship of mutual trust, everyone was put on salary. All associates today are salaried, non-exempt. They are paid when they miss work for any reason, and they are paid time-and-a-half for overtime."

The company also started a profit-sharing program. In keeping with its commitment to associate participation and responsibility, the 401K profit-sharing plan was designed by a team of seven nonmanagement associates and one senior manager. "The team invited four mutual fund companies to make presentations, and we chose the one we thought would be best for the associates," said Nelson Wainwright. "I only had one vote, like everyone else on the team. Our form might be corporate, but our attitude is partnership."

Another important change concerned the clothing that people wore to work. Since 1984, everyone in the organization—chairman and line worker alike—has worn the same uniform: black slacks and a white pinstripe shirt with the person's name on one side and "Team Wainwright" on the other.

"That was a tough change for some of the professional office people," said Susan Cutler, chief financial officer. "It doesn't phase me now, but it did at one time. Matter of fact, I used to change before I'd go out someplace. Now I don't know what I'd do if I had to go back. It's more comfortable, and it's a constant reminder of the climate we want around here."

Cutler also recalls when she was first instructed to share financial information that previously had been viewed as highly confidential. It was 1989, and she was told to provide specific financial data to a select group of about 15 supervisors.

"One of the supervisors who was going to receive the information came over and asked what I was doing," said Cutler. "When I told him, he asked, 'Are you sure you know what you're doing?' I felt a cold sweat come over me. So I shut my book, ran to David Robbins' office, and asked him if I really knew what I was doing. He said, 'Yes,' and that launched the open-book philosophy in our organization. Since 1991, we have shared our financial records with everyone in the company."

The overall effect of these efforts to build trust can be seen in many ways throughout the company, but perhaps none is more striking than the attendance rate. Since 1984, it has run consistently at 99%. Last year it was 98.9%. "The snowstorm wrecked our average," said Don Wainwright, only partly joking. "The fact is that people just like to work here. They know they're needed and appreciated, and they feel a strong personal responsibility to be here and get the job done."

Event No. 3: "We told associates we needed their help." (1991)

When the improvement process began several years ago, it was far from the success it is today. The reason is that it was driven by management. "It was a classic suggestion system," said Robbins. "We had a box on the wall, and cobwebs were in it. People had to go through an extensive process, determining financial justification, amount of rewards, and more. It was all counterproductive."

So, in 1991, management called all associates together to announce a change in procedures. "We told them we couldn't do it the old way anymore, and we couldn't do it without them," said Don Wainwright. "We told them we needed their help, and we were going to let them tell us what to do and how to do it. It really was an emotional experience for us."

That was the beginning of the company's CIP (continuous improvement process) system, and the response was overwhelming right from the start. "When we started listening, the associates started talking," said Don Wainwright. Almost overnight, improvements were being implemented at a rate dozens of times greater than before.

"I discovered an important lesson from that experience," said Don Wainwright. "You can delegate authority, but you cannot delegate responsibility. Responsibility comes from within. If you create an environment where people aren't motivated to exercise that personal sense of responsibility, you can give them all the authority in the world and they won't do anything with it."

"The experience also helped me understand something else very important," he added. "You just can't push 275 people and expect to get the best performance from them. The real finesse of effective management is to make growth come from within."

The CIP system has some limits that everyone has agreed on. Improvements that require significant capital investment have to go through a different process, for example. But Don Wainwright said it's the little things that make the biggest difference anyway.

"A thousand raindrops make an ocean, and all those little ideas add up," he said. "But more important, it's helping us create the kind of mind-set we need for a culture of continuous improvement. We don't stop the momentum by taking time to evaluate every little idea throughout the process. We train people right and let them go."

The change to the CIP system also shifted relationships between managers and other associates. "My title is plant manager," said Simms, "but I'm viewed now more as a plant adviser than a manager. The people on the line are running the operation, and I provide them with advice and support when they need it. It's a reflection of our emphasis on trust and belief."

basic skills. It collaborated with a local technical college to conduct the evaluation and then follow up with the appropriate development programs for associates. "We found, like many other companies these days, that some of our workers didn't have adequate reading and math skills," said Don Wainwright. "They had great coping skills that got them by for a long time, but our new processes required everyone to become proficient in basic skills."

The benefits of this particular training go beyond skills improvement. "We've heard heartwarming comments from some of our longtime associates who had trouble reading and writing before," said Don Wainwright. "They tell us how it has changed their lives, and that's tremendously gratifying."

As a tribute to the extensive training efforts, one of the men who previously had difficulty reading submitted the winning entry for the company's mission statement that was adopted in 1991: "Continuous Commitment to Our Customers' Future."

An important goal of the company's training program is job security for all associates. "We try very hard to reassign people

Still a student, not a master

In his presentation remarks at the Baldrige Award ceremony in Washington, DC, on Dec. 5, 1994, Don Wainwright recounted the story of a parable told by James C. Collins in his book *Built to Last*.¹

As Collins tells the story, a martial arts student goes to his master to receive the black belt after completing the highest level of training and demonstrating his proficiency. But the student, believing that he has reached the end of his journey, is turned away by the master. It is not until years later that the student finally understands the true meaning of the black belt: It is the beginning of discipline, work, and commitment to ever-higher standards of performance. At that moment, the master says the student is ready and confers the ultimate honor of the black belt upon him.

"It's the perfect analogy for our company," said Don Wainwright. "We are only beginning. As much as we cherish the Baldrige Award, we are more excited about the extensive feedback report we expect from the examiners telling us where we can improve."

Reference

1. James C. Collins, *Built to Last* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1994).

rather than letting them go when business conditions force us to change, but we can't make any guarantees," said Don Wainwright. "The best thing we can do for people is to provide them with 'employability security.' That means that associates will be trained so that they can produce at their maximum talents. The gains in productivity will help ensure Wainwright's and the associates' future. But if conditions force us to let people go or if people have a different vision that leads them elsewhere, they should be more employable. Being a Wainwright associate means something in the job market, and each person is his or her own source of employment security."

Building trust and belief

The commitment to training and the CIP system are rooted in a constant focus on some fundamental human relations principles. On the back of its Baldrige Award application, Wainwright Industries graphically depicted a series of steps to customer satisfaction. At the base of the illustration were the

words "Trust And Belief" in large, bold type.

"Those are not just nice words we use. We really live by them," said Nelson Wainwright. "There are no negative repercussions for making a wrong decision. That's really important. People won't get fired, chewed out, or called on the carpet. If someone does something really bizarre, we might talk about a better way they might have done it, but that's about all. Otherwise, they won't be honest and go the extra mile for us."

An example of that principle in action comes from the company's Texas plant. "We actually try to celebrate mistakes to help people appreciate how important it is to be up-front about them," said David Robbins, chief operating officer. "The people at the Texas plant are all new to our system. We were having some problems with doors and other parts of the plant being damaged by material handling equipment, and people were afraid to report it. When a guy finally told me that he had damaged an overhead door moving big racks of parts, I called a plantwide meeting. I explained what happened, and then I shook the guy's hand and congratulated him in front of everyone. Then we all talked about how important it was to have that information so we could study the problem and avoid it in the future."

What was the result? Reported incidents of damage went from zero to 90% overnight. It's a striking example of how the company approaches learning and development.

"Almost everything good that's happened in this company has evolved from failure," said Simms. "It's not from the mistake itself as much as the emotional impact of the mistake. Everyone fails, and there's tremendous stress when that happens. But the difference is how you think about the future. Are you going to be optimistic or pessimistic? That's what drives the next step—either another mistake or an improvement. The only way to be optimistic and improve is to truly trust and believe that it's the system and not the people at fault when there's a failure and to trust and believe that people have the tools, attitudes, and abilities to fix it."

Keeping awards in perspective

Since the Baldrige Award was first presented in 1988, only six of the 22 total awards have gone to small businesses. So why was Wainwright Industries one of those six?

"It was the company's overall picture—how it fulfilled all of the criteria," said Curt Reimann, director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology, which manages the award. "A lot of organizations rely on a few pizzazz factors rather than the overall enterprise. We look closely at the connectors, the cross-category things. Wainwright Industries' performance is broad and deep. All of the key elements are embedded throughout the organization. That's especially impressive for a small company. What we saw also indicated that if we took a snapshot a year from now, the company would probably look even better. And that's important to us."

A striking example of how pervasively the improvement process is embedded and connected throughout the company's culture is the collection of softball trophies that line the windows in the main conference room at the front of the headquarters building. "We were terrible several years ago," said Don Wainwright. "We could barely win a game, let alone a trophy. But we systematically worked on the process, and we finally figured out how to produce a consistently winning team."

While the softball trophies are displayed with pride, winning a Baldrige Award clearly has been the crowning achievement in

a long series of tributes that Wainwright Industries has earned in recent years, including the 1993 Missouri Quality Award; supplier awards from General Motors, Ford, IBM, and McDonnell Douglas; and an award from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources for "Leadership and Innovation in the Field of Industrial Energy Efficiency."

Wainwright Industries officials, however, refuse to let the awards lull them into taking a breather. "We have to keep the Baldrige Award in perspective because after winning it, you have to ask yourself, 'Now what?'" said Simms. "It's really the struggle to victory that's important, not the victory itself."

"People believe that the way we do things is easier. It's not. In fact, it's tougher, but it's also a lot more rewarding for everyone. That leads to self-recognition and self-motivation, and that's what really is most important—people doing what they do for their own reasons. That's what makes the whole process sustainable."

Less than two weeks after receiving the Baldrige Award, several associates met to discuss how individual goals and ambitions could be met and still remain aligned with company goals. "That's a good example of how we're always looking ahead to what's next for us, never getting complacent with where we are—always leading the duck," said Don Wainwright. "It truly is a never-ending journey, and it seems the more we grow, the more opportunity we see for even greater growth."

In terms of specific goals for the future, the "head" at Wainwright Industries points to goals such as six-sigma quality throughout the organization, a 50% decrease in customer complaints and cost of quality, and an ECSI of 98%. The "heart" simply points to the company mascot and the saying, "Never, never give up."

But Don Wainwright warns against starting the change process by focusing on the symbols. "Every time I talk about the duck, I'm a little afraid that someone is actually going to run out and buy one," he said. "That's not the point. In fact, the duck is kind of silly. Symbols like that have to be very personal, and they have to emerge naturally out of the change process, not out of some planned initiative to launch a quality program. That's getting the cart before the horse."

Don Wainwright adds that the main reason he tells the duck story is to ensure people understand that the secret to success does not lie primarily in the tools and techniques. "The skills are essential," he said, "but first and foremost, quality has to come from the heart."

Reference

1. Wainwright Industries uses Motorola's definition of six sigma.

Les Landes is the president of Landes Communications in St. Louis, MO. He received a bachelor's degree in journalism and mass communications from the University of Iowa in Iowa City. Landes is a member of ASQC.

What did you think about this article?

Quality Progress needs your feedback. On the postage-paid reader service card inserted toward the back of this magazine, please circle the number that corresponds with your opinion of the preceding article.	Excellent	Circle #301
	Good	Circle #302
	Fair	Circle #303
	Poor	Circle #304