

Joseph M. Juran

A search for universal principles

"It is most important that top management be quality-minded. In the absence of sincere manifestation of interest at the top, little will happen below."

The only thing that distinguishes these comments from those heard commonly today is that they were written in 1945 by Joseph M. Juran, ASQ's eighth Honorary member.

By 1945, as local quality control societies were forming the regional organizations that would merge into a national quality group, Juran was about to embark on his second career, which would earn him more than 30 awards from organizations around the world, including ASQ's Edwards Medal and Brumbaugh and Grant Awards. Juran joined the Bell System as an engineer in 1924; two years later, he was one of three people assigned to a new department formed to carry out what is known today as statistical quality control. Juran prepared what may have been the first text on statistical quality control—and perhaps the ancestor of today's widely used *Western Electric Statistical Quality Control Handbook*.

That early interest in writing and teaching foreshadowed the course Juran's career would take; within a few years, he became involved in quality management and the subject to which he would devote his life: management. The stage was set and the government, as if on cue, called on Juran to serve as an administrator in the Lend-Lease Administration—an event that was a key step for Juran.

The son of an immigrant, Juran was seeking security when he went to work for the Bell System in the years following World War I. He lacked the clear sense of direction that marked his later life; by his own admission, he was "in the grip of forces more powerful than I was." He expected to spend his entire career at the Bell System, but after four years on a leave of absence for government service, Juran decided not to return to the company. He had begun career in research, lecturing, philosophizing, consulting, and writing on management.

Juran's second career began from a base at New York University, where he served for a time as head of the Department of Industrial Engineering. His arrangement with NYU allowed him to spend a good deal of time on matters not connected with teaching. One was the writing and editing of the *Quality Control Handbook*. First published in 1951, the *Handbook* has grown from 15 chapters to 52, paralleling and aiding the growth of the quality field.

During the late 1940s, Juran began to develop what may have been the most influential course on the subject of quality since the eight-day seminars conducted during World War II. Juran's "Managing for Quality" has been taught to more than 100,000 people in over 40 countries.

For almost 30 years, Juran offered the course through the American Management Association, the second institutional base of his second career. Given his longstanding interests, Juran's association with AMA was not surprising. His writings in *Industrial Quality Control* during the 1950s and 1960s also reflect his interest in management. As a contributing author and editor for 16 years of "Management's Corner," Juran frequently emphasized the role of management in quality. He saw early on the broadening role of quality and urged quality professionals to prepare for it.

Juran's reputation in quality management led the Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers to invite him to Japan in 1954. In his book *What Is Total Quality Control? The Japanese Way*, Kaoru Ishikawa describes what happened:

[Juran] conducted seminars for top and middle-level managers, explaining to them the roles they had to play in promoting QC activities.

Japanese managers had shown little understanding or interest when those young quality control research group members explained QC to them, but Dr. Juran, with his worldwide reputation, was more persuasive.

Juran's visit marked a transition in Japan's quality control activities from dealing primarily with technology based in factories to an overall concern for the entire management. The Juran visit created an atmosphere in which QC was to be regarded as a tool of management, thus creating an opening for the establishment of total quality control as we know it today.

Juran gave more credit to the Japanese than to Americans for what transpired over the next 30 years. What would have happened if no American experts had lectured in Japan in the 1950s? About the same that did, Juran believes: "It might have taken them two or three years longer to arrive at the same place," he said. Indeed, by the 1960s, Juran began to report to Americans on the new ideas on quality coming out of Japan—ideas like quality circles.

Juran's teaching led to the publication of another major book in 1970. *Quality Planning and Analysis*, co-authored with Frank Gryna, was written to fill the need for a textbook on the subject of quality. Like the *Handbook*, it has been a bestseller since it first appeared.

For three decades, NYU and AMA gave Juran a great deal of flexibility; the idea of creating his own company was unsettling. "I was afraid of it for years," he said. Nevertheless, in retrospect, the Juran Institute seems a logical extension of his style of working. Juran's objective has always been to capture the universals that lay behind daily experiences. He has even analyzed the process by which he arrives at these general principles: experience, reflection on that experience with an eye to discovering broader truths, presentation of the ideas for comment and discussion, refinement, and finally publication in a paper or book.

The process of developing ideas had been a gradual one for Juran. Top management involvement, the Pareto principle, the need for widespread training in quality, the definition of quality as fitness for use, the project-by-project approach to quality improvement—these are the ideas for which Juran was best known, and all emerged gradually.

But at least once an important idea appeared in what Juran remembered as "one of those blinding flashes of illumination." The illumination came from the work of anthropologist Margaret Mead, who showed that cultural patterns were at the root of the resistance to change that doomed many of the efforts of technical experts sent overseas to modernize living conditions. Juran immediately applied this insight to the practical needs of managers. He developed his ideas in a series of papers—one of them a Brumbaugh Award winner—and in presentations to a wide range of audiences. He then set down the fruits of his intellectual labor in *Managerial Breakthrough*.

In Juran's philosophic approach there was an implicit recognition of the need to communicate. Not surprisingly, Juran's writing was as clear and elegant as his

ideas. Moreover, Juran always had a lively interest in language, reflected in his discussions of proposals using words like "ophelimity" to take the place of the misunderstood word "quality." A sense of humor always enlivened his prose, as when he observed that one reason for buying the *Quality Control Handbook* was to impress visitors.

But impressing readers was not Juran's objective, nor was humor or smoothness of style his major accomplishments. In fact, describing Juran's career briefly is a daunting task. While introducing Juran at the Annual Quality Congress in 1986, then ASQ president Dana M. Cound recalled a similar dilemma facing a sports announcer who introduced a man who had played almost every position in baseball with grace and skill. Rather than trying to enumerate the player's accomplishments, his introduction was both direct and comprehensive: "I give you Jim Gilliam, baseball player." Cound followed that lead and summarized a distinguished career very simply saying, "I give you Dr. Joseph M. Juran, teacher."

Learn more about [Dr. Juran](#)'s life work at the Juran Institute.