The Pursuit of Excellence
Quality Management

To excel means to surpass others. Excellence means a superior quality over the standard or norm. That implies a difference in quality between two producers. That means inequality. The paradox is that America was founded on the concept of the equality of man, though we strive to excel.

Quality is defined as the usefulness and beauty of a product or service. Quality is measured by comparing the product or service to a standard or norm. Quality is controlled by adjusting the standard or norm to which it is compared and rejecting all substandard products or services. However, a less expensive and more effective way of assuring quality is by monitoring and adjusting the processes that produce the end-product. That concept is called quality assurance. Total quality management (TQM) incorporates quality control, quality assurance, and a systems approach. The claim is made that 90% of all quality problems are a result of system problems. TQM looks primarily at how the systems of production can be adjusted to enhance the quality of the product or service.

Occasionally, there is a temptation to misinterpret the self-evident truth that all men are created equal in order to devise systems in which no man can fail. The unfortunate consequence of such a system is that, under such a system, no man can excel. If a standard is set so that all men will meet it, there is little incentive, and considerable opposition, to exceed the standard. As shown by numerous
socialist experiments, the opportunity to fail, and learn from failure, is an integral part of human nature.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence that the fact that all men are created equal is self-evident. However, any glance at men and women convinces an observer that no two men are equal any more than any two pieces of produce are equal. Shoppers spend a great deal of time and effort choosing the highest quality produce in the supermarket precisely because no two are equal. What is self-evident is that each man has worth to himself and to others, and that each can increase that worth by effort. There is no measure to the potential worth of a man; therefore, each man must be given equal opportunity to grow and to excel. Equality under the law is what Jefferson sought.

In medieval Europe, the chief way men were educated was by apprenticeship. A master, who set the standards for quality from his experience in what was possible, taught one or more apprentices how to achieve the standard. When the apprentice was able to meet the standard, he was referred to as a journeyman and was able to work without supervision. When a journeyman learned how to exceed the standard of workmanship set by the previous master, he graduated to the status of master himself. The piece of workmanship that demonstrated his skill was referred to as a masterpiece. Not every worker achieved the status of a master, yet each worker was chosen on his potential to do so.
In today’s marketplace, the status of the worker is not so clear-cut. Teamwork, education, and effort contribute to the quality of the product, and the standards are set by the consuming marketplace. Success in the work world today is measured by successful garnering of market share. Your contribution to quality will be measured by your willingness to learn, work, and cooperate.