

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT

Gary Ruffhead, Director of GPR Professional Services Ltd, UK

Gary Ruffhead, Director of GPR Professional Services Ltd – a quality and audit consultancy firm in the UK – explains why staff should have a clear understanding of their audit and quality management processes, particularly during times of change

What does quality mean to you and your business?

After spending over two decades working with business standards across multidisciplinary sectors (engineering, capital goods and business services), it always comes back to designing a management system that is fit for purpose, by not over-engineering the solution.

As a client-facing business, our brand and methodology are especially important to us and have been built on the following three pillars:

- **Quality** – tailored solutions that are fit for purpose.
- **Subject matter expert** – knowledge and experience.
- **Reliability** – a go-to business with trusted advisors.

How do you encourage your staff and customers to focus on quality improvement?

We encourage businesses to create a culture of mentoring and coaching, with an emphasis on reinforcing what quality means to their business. This can be achieved by developing your own personal brand and being able to articulate it to ensure you're consistent with your messaging in order to improve business performance and increase customer satisfaction/retention.

How has your business been delivering effective audits to meet client needs and expectations, particularly during the pandemic?

We are listening to our client base and constructively challenging their perception towards risk; ensuring that risks are not just being identified but are also evaluated correctly to exploit any opportunities for growth. Having insight into their appetite/acceptance criteria for risk is particularly important here; aligning audits to this by following relevant audit trails – not going off on tangents – will ultimately increase engagement from the auditees.

How have quality improvement and quality processes benefited your organisation?

Quality has made us an agile and progressive business, where decisions are now made easily by focusing on the expected outcomes of our management system. Our quality processes have enabled us to practise what we preach by creating a value chain that showcases how these are instrumental to the success of our organisation, while reminding us of our purpose – the customer.

What challenges relating to quality assurance might you see businesses face in future?

In times of economic recession, some organisations are tempted to compromise on quality assurance to reduce overheads. This is not a sustainable solution, especially in more practical environments where outputs cannot always be verified by subsequent quality controls. Businesses must endeavour to provide confidence in assurance activities and not compromise the quality controls across their products and services.



We are encouraged by the Industry Position Statement (bit.ly/3m6DdRi) on the use of accredited certification throughout supply chains, which will improve organisational resilience and brand integrity for businesses.

What advice would you give to auditors who want to be heard by senior management?

Be passionate about what you are doing, especially if auditing is not your main function; ensure that you understand the overall audit programme's objectives and validate your audit against them; and be clear about the scope and criteria, allowing yourself the flexibility for it to be critiqued by the auditor.

Employees should use the audit to help disseminate topical issues (eg, management systems) by reinforcing the importance and contribution that quality and audit has throughout the business; seek to understand where other audits have added value and anticipate future audit trails.

How does your business plan to provide better audits and quality services to customers in 2021?

At the moment, it's about CPD, CPD, and more CPD because of the way we are having to interact with people remotely. Our communication skills and keeping abreast of the latest thinking/guidance has become a main priority.

Identifying suitable webinars, allowing for time and allocating a budget are all key enablers for conducting audits and providing quality services to our customers during the pandemic.