



LEADERSHIP

Unsung Heroes Of Quality

by **Debbie Phillips-Donaldson, editor**

Guru or not to guru. In the “Up Front” column of the April issue of *QP*, I shared a challenge from Joseph. M. Juran, one of quality’s pioneers. The subject was quality gurus, a concept Juran dislikes. He believes the media look for an event and person they can hype and christen “guru” (for example, with him it was probably the publishing of his *Quality Control Handbook*). He believes most quality leaders are quietly working away without recognition. His challenge: “The media include you. You could write an editorial praising the work of one of these unsung heroes and create a guru!”

The phrase “unsung heroes” struck a chord with me—and several readers. In response to my request for information on quality leaders who to date have gone relatively unnoticed and, in some cases, unappreciated, readers wrote about 11 such people. (Two received several mentions each.) Depending on your interpretation, they may or may not be considered gurus—but in these readers’ minds, they are definitely quality heroes.

In 50 Words Or Less

- Several *QP* readers share their appreciation for quality leaders who don’t always get their due.
- Some are authors, educators or speakers whose names are recognizable; others are quality professionals who toil quietly but tirelessly within their organizations, making more of an impact than even they may realize.

Spreading the Quality Gospel

While the quality leaders mentioned here represent a variety of areas of expertise, they all have certain characteristics in common:

- They tend to be original thinkers, coming up with unique concepts or applying known techniques or tools in unconventional ways.
- Whether concentrating on one methodology or serving as general quality experts, these leaders all have vast knowledge of their fields.
- None of this knowledge is pure theory; all the leaders are skilled at helping others apply it in practical, actionable ways.
- No matter how complex the topic, these leaders excel at explaining the information in a way everyone—even beginners—can understand, remember and apply.
- This ability to help others learn stems from all these leaders being lifelong learners themselves; one is described as having a “relentless passion for learning more.”
- That word—passion—appears frequently in descriptions of these unsung heroes. Synonyms and related qualities include dynamic, inspiring, talented, on a mission and “spreading the quality gospel.”
- Perhaps the most important characteristic—what makes them true heroes—is their desire to help others. Words like “selfless” and “unselfish” are common, as are “mentoring,” “encouraging” and “supportive.” Whether imparting their knowledge to others is their livelihood or a secondary role, these leaders all are known for sharing it at no apparent gain for themselves, other than knowing they’ve helped someone pursue quality.

Babich: Hoshin Expert

One reader recommended an unsung quality hero who specializes in a niche of the field. "Pete Babich is uniquely experienced in *hoshin* principles," wrote Kim Niles, quality engineer at Delta Designs in Poway, CA. "Babich has written books, developed software and makes his living consulting on this very specific subject. When you type 'hoshin' into Google, you get almost 41,000 hits, and his site is the very first one."

Babich is president of Total Quality Enterprises Inc. (also in Poway), which he founded in 1991 after many years working in quality at Hewlett-Packard. In addition to the achievements Niles mentioned, Babich has developed and conducted more than 100 workshops and consulted with more than 50 organizations to facilitate implementation of *hoshin kanri*. He has also developed and conducted numerous workshops and training programs in design of experiments (DOE) and process management and improvement.

Barrentine: Mentor and Friend

Another nomination of a quality hero was bitter-sweet. "Earlier this year, a personal mentor of mine lost his battle against cancer," wrote Suzanne G. Fiorino, director, process excellence, for Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceutical Research & Development in Raritan, NJ. "Larry Barrentine is best known for bringing a high level of both knowledge and practicality to the process improvement field via his writing and mentorship. He was the author of the two popular ASQ Quality Press books, *Concepts for R&R Studies* and *Introduction to Design of Experiments: A Simplified Approach*."

Barrentine, an independent consultant, lived in Knoxville, TN, which is where Fiorino met him. "We were both working for a consulting firm. As a younger practitioner in quality, I would often get the 'correct' statistical answer from the theoretical statisticians on staff. Afterward I would go ask Barrentine for an interpretation," Fiorino explained. "He never failed to provide the answer I could understand. He supported individuals such as myself growing into our own by providing friendship and mentorship."

That support continued for Fiorino. "Many years later, I would check in with Barrentine occasionally and gain his input on a particularly tricky area. I will miss consulting with him, and I hope others can continue to appreciate him through his written word."

Ermer: From Campus to the World

Dave Murn, senior quality engineer with Springs Window Fashions in Middleton, WI, wrote about his

former professor, Donald S. Ermer, Procter & Gamble professor emeritus in total quality, departments of industrial and mechanical engineering, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW).

An ASQ Fellow, Ermer received the Eugene L. Grant Medal in 2000. He is also a founding member of ASQ section 1217 (Madison), Murn said. "He has held a variety of leadership roles in the section, including chair. At a recent member recognition event, Ermer was affectionately deemed the section's 'pope of quality.'" In support of his many students, Murn added, Ermer continues to serve as faculty advisor to UW's Student Quality Society, a position he has held since the group formed in 1994.

Ermer's contributions extend beyond UW and ASQ. He was one of 100 inaugural examiners for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) in 1988, Murn said, and served again in 1995 and 1999. In 1996, then Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson asked Ermer to facilitate a team to establish a state quality award, resulting in the Wisconsin Forward Award (WFA).

In 1972, Ermer was the United Nations Industrial Development Organization expert on industrial quality and worked with the Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research to establish a national quality certification program.

"As my graduate advisor, teacher, mentor and friend, Ermer had an impact on my career that cannot be quantified," Murn concluded. "At his recent retirement party, students from around the country and beyond returned to the Madison campus to honor him and express their appreciation."

Hoisington: Financial Value

Steve Hoisington, vice president of quality at Johnson Controls in Milwaukee, received kudos from Elizabeth Menzer, executive director of WFA in Madison, WI. "He has a wealth of experience learned and applied at Johnson Controls and IBM that spans all the quality tools and disciplines. His capability to understand, explain and use these tools is demonstrated through his ASQ certification as a quality manager, his selection as an MBNQA examiner, senior examiner and alumni for an unprecedented 11 years, his appointment as judge for WFA and through the numerous articles and books he has written."

Menzer said the way Hoisington uses and promotes quality tools is particularly impressive. "He is quick and eager to share his knowledge and expertise with others, offering his help to anyone in any organization,

