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Editor's Message



Quality & the Eye of the Beholder by Kendall Hoyd

"Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten." —Gucci family motto

One of the interesting things about operating a truss plant is the pursuit of quality. I think that the reason the pursuit of quality is interesting, and not just hard, is the tricky challenge of getting the darn word defined in a way that is useful for planning and decision-making. W. Edwards Deming, who is widely considered to be the father of quality management in business, defined quality as "fitness for use." Great. What the heck does that mean?

Well, that depends on who you are doesn't it? Some of these definitions might sound familiar:

Framer: Trusses fit the job, plane through with no additional effort, layouts are easy to read, and everything that can be trussed has been trussed. Basically the trusses can be set with no difficulty whatsoever.

Inspector: Lumber sizes and grades and plate sizes are the same as or better than what is on the truss design drawings, and there are no visible manufacturing defects such as excessive gaps between members or poorly pressed plates.

Truss Engineer: Trusses are designed with lumber grades, sizes and plate sizes to properly support the loads as defined by the Building Designer, and the ensuing manufacturing process faithfully follows the ANSI/TPI 1 quality criteria.

Homebuyer: If the homebuyer walks through the job in the framing stages, he or she might want to see clean, clear lumber, but basically they expect that if the trusses pass inspection, the roof won't fall down.

Contractor/Truss Buyer: No complaints from the framer, inspector or homebuyer.

Truss Plant Owner/Manager: All of the above, plus we have to be comfortable that we have designed, engineered and manufactured the components to stand the test of time that stretches beyond the careers or involvement of anyone who is currently involved in the process.

The brilliance of the "fitness for use" definition is that it is sort of like the language in the Constitution—it is broadly and artfully crafted to cover just about everything important. So we

just have to meet that “fitness for use” criterion, and we are producing a quality product.

What’s important about all of this to our industry is that in classic quality language, the customer defines “fitness for use,” or we can say that we have delivered quality when we have “met the customer’s requirements.” Now we have to talk about who the heck is the customer out of the list outlined above, and whose requirements are we trying to meet?

We, the truss industry, are the only ones who can assimilate all of the definitions of quality that overlap each other, but are not identical, into a package that also meets all of the other criteria that determine if a product is economically viable or not, such as price, availability, etc. This doesn’t mean that we define quality, because only a customer can do that, but it does mean that we can perform the delicate balancing act among all of the “customers’” requirements.

With In-Plant WTCA-QC, our industry has done outstanding work in defining the quality standard for our product, and has improved both the accuracy and the usability of the QC tools for truss plants, as well as the accessibility of information and analysis. This has served to put in place a quality framework that does an excellent job of considering and balancing all of the criteria and needs that have to be met. The more we all support, utilize and promote In-Plant WTCA-QC in our industry, the more it will evolve into the de facto standard for defining “fitness for use,” and that will work to the benefit of all of our customers in both the short and long term.

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