

“Welcome to a quality future” with Inkerman Panels

My business had the same problems as the woodsman. Sure, I had a lot of work. We have a terrific reputation and, now we're accredited by the major insurance companies, we've got wonderful clientele, but at a certain point, the manager must stop and say, "Hey, it's time to sharpen the saw." The principles of Total Quality Management showed us how to do it."

Andy Holzer is Managing Director of Inkerman Panels smash repair shop situated only 4.5 kms from Central Melbourne. "We're a family business," says Andy Holzer, "that has been here for 44 years. My dad started the business. We have always been very customer service and quality oriented. Always. Some of our clients are third generation customers and some of the corporate fleets we work for have been customers of ours for well over 20 years.

"We are on the main route into town and very close to corporate fleets. We understand their needs and we are flexible in accommodating them. We have very specific systems to assist the corporate fleets to get their cars back on the road quickly and well prepared.

"Ours is a multi-million dollar business nowadays. We have about 30 staff and we work very hard and very long hours. Above all, we are very customer service oriented. We have a "preferred client" scheme where people can register with us and for that we guarantee them twenty percent reduced off-road time than normal."

Inkerman Panels is no ordinary smash repair shop. Five years ago they moved into a brand new facility



ANDY HOLZER
Managing Director,
Inkerman Panels Pty Ltd,
Melbourne

A busy business is probably no different to the woodsman sawing wood in a forest and sawing just as hard as he possibly can. A passerby says, "Hey, isn't it time you sharpened your saw?" and the woodsman replies, "Look I am so busy sawing, I haven't time to stop."

designed from the ground up by the family.

"In the past, the word 'panel shop' may have conjured up images of a

backyard operation with a dog on the backseat of a car as the only means of security," says Andy Holzer. "ISO9000 or Total Quality Management were unheard of in our industry. Now let me show you a letter received from Bob Lee, Business Development Manager of ICI Autocolor, Berkshire, England. It's quite a long letter but two sentences stand out.

"Your standards, quality of repair and customer service were the best that I saw in Australia and indeed there would only be one or two shops that I've seen in the whole of Europe that would favourably compare to Inkerman Panels.

"The detail in the planning stage of your new business that you and your brother committed to were extraordinary. However, the 'pay-off' is now clear for all to see."

DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS TQM

"We felt that we had got to the top of the tree in our country," continued Andy Holzer. "There are only two Lexus approved repairers in Victoria and we're one of them. We're the first Eunos approved repairer in Australia. We are one of only three JMJ approved repairers in Victoria and we're the only repairers handling John Blair Honda work.

"We realised all this yet we thought, 'How can we get our act together even better and formally structure what we're doing?'"

"When the Small Business "Growth Through Quality" Program was announced by the Australian Quality Council, it was natural that we wanted to participate so as to commence benchmarking to top international standards.

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"It was a great course, originally conceived by Don Wood of Telecom and developed by small business TQM winners in the Telecom State Government Small Business Awards, and then sponsored by the Australian Quality Council. The first meeting I went to, along with my foreman and my Quality Control Manager, all three of us said, 'This is absolutely fantastic.'

"We grew to understand the difference between ISO9000 and TQM concepts and once I got the flavour of that message, I felt there was no way that we would stop at ISO9000. We were determined to go all the way with Total Quality Management.

"We've already made contact with other organisations internationally who've gone down the track in similar businesses to ours. We're looking at where they are going, how we can learn from their mistakes, how we can improve and become even better.

“We don't advertise. We put all our resources back into absolutely molly coddling and spoiling our clients.”

"This emphasis on accreditation for small business has strong reasons. It is linked to a Federal Government decision which requires that firms wishing to do business with the Government need an Externally Certifiable Quality System. For this, businesses must have an independent, external auditor assess their internal systems and quality standards.

"We have always felt the need for something like this TQM approach," said Andy Holzer. "It was like a big balloon and we didn't know how to get our hands around it or how to get on top of it. Now we have been shown the handles, we know where they are and we know how to hang on to them. We're climbing up and



Part of the customer audience enjoying the presentations by industry experts.

nothing in the world is going to stop us from getting on top of the best in Total Quality Management and in benchmarking."

THE CUSTOMER CONCEPT

Andy was asked whether he intended to develop nationally or even internationally.

"Not necessarily. We don't want to spread to more outlets, but we do want to benchmark. We want to be in a situation where we look after our clients so well, that not only will they come back when they need us, but will send all their friends and relatives as well.

"We don't advertise. What we do, however, is put all our resources back into absolutely molly coddling and spoiling our clients. We want their first experience with us to be such that it will be a lasting experience.

We have a saying at Inkerman Panels that we are no different to a soccer team and the customer is the ball. Every staff member, or player on the field, must never take their eyes off the ball. Any decision that we make or action we take, is made after considering the impact that it will have

on the ball who is our customer. We are a ball team, all kicking in one direction. No hand passing is allowed. Our administration staff are the captain and coach."

And do the customers respond to the principles of Inkerman Panels? Andy Holzer was quick to respond.

"We had an evening here last year in conjunction with the National Insurance Brokers Association and Australian Fleet Magazine. We had over 220 participants that evening ... all corporate fleet managers, insurance brokers and decision makers in business.

"We had a solicitor who spoke on compulsory third party insurance, another from NIBA itself and one from the National Safety Council of Australia. A great deal of the evening, however, was focused on quality and we had Noel Robinson, Project Director of the Australian Quality Council speaking about quality and how it could impact on our organisation and on our customers."

THE QUALITY JOURNEY

One of the great problems in introducing TQM into an organisation

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is that while it may have the full support of top management, the staff do not feel the same personal commitment. This problem was put to Andy Holzer.

"Whenever I employ new staff, and

This world class complex built with glass panels encourages critical analysis of its operation by passers by.



meetings with the rest of our staff. Our longest serving employee has been with us for 30 years so you can understand that we are requiring something of a paradigm shift from the way we used to handle matters, to the

after they have gone through the interviews and I am satisfied they're the right people, I still don't announce that they have a job. I first give them the introduction module of the TQM philosophy to read. It probably takes the best part of an hour and a half but I insist they must read it, and more importantly, understand it.

"I say to them, 'If you understand this approach and are prepared to adopt this culture and philosophy then you are with us. If you feel the approach is not for you, then I would have difficulty employing you here.' You see all of us are going down the track together. We're on a vehicle that cannot stop.

"I personally have written all the paperwork for applying TQM into our organisation. The Quality Manual is written and the Procedures Manual is also complete. On the other hand, I don't see accreditation as the be-all and end-all. To me the most important part is the people part involving my staff. It is vital that the staff fully understand and come along the track with me ... fully appreciate and understand that they, too, will reap the benefits from the TQM culture.

"Five of my staff have already gone to courses and those five have regular

new customer-oriented and quality-focused approach.

"I issue literature to my staff all the time so that they know how I'm thinking, and I talk regularly with all our staff so that I know how they, too, are thinking.

"I invited Rod Palmer - the Instructor/Presenter from the TQM course - who came along and gave a five hour presentation to the entire group telling them just *what* the principles of TQM involved, *how* it involved them, and *why* they were so necessary as part of the philosophy. They ended up agreeing it was important that every staff member be involved and understanding just what was in it for each of them.

STAFF COMMITMENT

"Yes - the times they are a-changing. Yesterday's dreams are today's realities.

"Just prior to Christmas I took all the staff out to dinner .. but it was a working dinner ... we progressed along our flow charts, measuring our improvement in the various areas as well as highlighting where the pitfalls existed."

The explanations given by Andy Holzer indicated that he knew exactly what was involved in incorporating

TQM into business philosophy. "I might say, one of the most difficult parts is in introducing this new philosophy while we have to keep the business running. But what has not changed in four decades of Inkerman Panels - and never will - is our 'yes we can' approach. That philosophy is firmly set in concrete. Whatever the situation that our clients may encounter, wherever possible here at Inkerman Panels, our answer will be, 'yes, we can'."

Networking is a current buzzword in business in which it is proposed that smaller businesses come together with other businesses of similar interests so that, as a combined unit, they can progress with product, market or export development not possible as individuals. The point was put to Andy Holzer as part of his forward planning.

"The Australian Quality Council does suggest that we network amongst the groups that have gone through their program. So - yes, I will be doing that, but I am also looking, as you know, at areas in Europe for further examples.

"Right now we are putting our principles to the test. On the night when we had the customer gathering we actually repaired, painted, assembled and finished a car in a matter of two and a half hours. The participants saw us doing the whole shooting match.

As you can see from the photos, our whole business operation is exposed to the view of passersby. We really put ourselves to the test and came up trumps.

"In my book," concluded Andy Holzer, "anyone who is not involved in quality in the not too distant future will have major problems on their hands. I am just very grateful to be at the cutting edge of it all. If we manage the operation properly, we will be off and running before competitors have realised just what is happening.

"My staff and I say, 'Welcome to the future'."

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