

IDENTIFYING THE True Craftsmen in your Company

by Mario Guertin
President, PDCA Craftsmanship Forum
President, Painting in Partnership, Inc.

This issue of *DECO Magazine* is packed with examples of outstanding craftsmanship in the painting industry..

I would like for us to pause for a moment and reflect on the qualities and work habits someone must possess in order to be a true craftsman. Right off the bat, I would like to dismiss the notion that only the "crème de la crème" can be called craftsmen. In other words, often, we confuse the word "master" with "craftsman" and think that only masters are true craftsmen. The truth is that craftsmanship is as much a "mindset" as it is mastering the technical skills. The relevant question to ask is this: What are the qualities and work habits that enable someone to become a master, over time, at whatever he or she does?

The answer to that question will give you key distinctions to observe and detect who, among the people in your organization, demonstrates those qualities and work habits. You can then use that insight and to help guide them in the further development of their leadership skills, mastery and mentorship abilities. Most importantly, once you gain a good handle on those distinctions, you can devise a hiring process that helps identify good candidates and design training systems that foster their development as craftsmen under the mentorship of your star performers.

An Illustration

Several years ago, I went to a popular chain of pizza restaurants to have a bite to eat. I sat at a counter surrounding a large round pizza oven. Upon sitting down, I immediately noticed the pizza chef (I will call him Fernando) busy at work on the other side of the counter. I ordered my food and, while waiting for it to arrive, I observed Fernando going through all the steps of the pizza making process. First, he took the ball of dough, flattened it into a thin crust, bulged the edges, spread the tomato sauce, added ingredients etc. While taking these steps, Fernando was, at the same time, orchestrating the cooking process of the pizzas in the oven. Some of the steps included bringing the fresh pizzas to the rear of the oven, then slowly rotating them towards the front of the oven as they cooked, then pulling them out at just the right moment and tagging them for its proper recipient.

While watching this pizza making process, I also made

observations about Fernando's demeanor. During the whole time I was watching him, he had a smile on his face. He was focused and had intensity about his work. Additionally, he seemed to have a strong concern for efficiency of motion and an overarching care for the quality of the end result. He displayed passion about his work! It was the combination of these qualities, work habits and technical skill that was an inspiration to observe. As an observer of this process, I was excited and inspired to have been a witness to all this, so much so, that I can still talk about it as if it were yesterday!

Our friend Fernando had clearly achieved a high level of competency about his work. I could say he was a "virtuoso" or "master" at what he did, well deserving of applause. The Fernando's of the world are not born masters. They become masters because they have a certain mindset (or attitude) and have developed basic qualities and work habits that allow them to grow, learn and acquire ever-expanding competency.

For many years I have asked myself what are those distinguishing factors that lead someone to eventual mastery? I believe that those distinguishing traits are foundational to being a true craftsman. Having clarity about those distinctions can empower not only the achievement of mastery by your star craftsmen, but also empower the development of all your painters. It is with this purpose in mind that I wrote this article.

Before discussing the basic qualities and attributes of a true craftsman, I would like to share how I have gained my insights into the nature of craftsmanship. First of all, I have been a painter for the 13 years and a painting contractor for over 20 years. Also, I was the founder and have been President of the PDCA Craftsmanship Forum for over 8 years. During this time, I have had the privilege of getting to know and observe scores of craftsmen from all over the country and have come to the conclusion that there are 6 basic foundational factors that characterize a true craftsman. Creatively managing all these factors in a consistent and reliable manner requires focus and intensity on the part of the craftsman.

1- Love of One's Work

This may sound kind of basic, but how many people do you know for whom their work is just a job, a means to a paycheck? A true craftsman has a very positive attitude towards his/her

In other words, often, we confuse the word “master” with “craftsman” and think that only masters are true craftsmen.

work and approaches each day with an excitement for the opportunity to make a difference.

2- Thirst to Know, Learn and Grow

A true craftsman has an insatiable thirst to learn, experiment, understand and perfect one's methods, tools and practices. Often practicing on one's own time, doing research on the Internet, talking to other professionals are common habits for this person.

3- Focus and Intensity

Like the example of the pizza chef or a house painter, the execution of one's work involves the coordination and mastery of great many variables. Here are some major variables for house painters:

- The hands and the body develop habits. They must be trained to perform tasks better and more efficiently everyday.
- The eyes also play a critical role. They assess the correctness of execution and the aesthetic quality of the work being performed.
- The mind must be alert and active. It must be engaged in the monitoring and assessing all the pieces of this puzzle, including environmental aspects such as moisture, temperature, weather, dust level, wind, among others. Furthermore, engaging the mind enables one to step away from the bark of the tree and see the forest, and make decisions that take the whole forest into consideration.
- Yes, even the ears get involved! Some of the trade tools of a craftsman make a sound when they are used, such as a brush, for example. A particular sound a brush makes may indicate that there is not enough paint in the brush and will affect the finish.

4- Pursuit of Excellence, Within the Constraints of Time and Purpose

All the intensity and focus described above have one purpose: ensuring the quality of the end result, while meeting the constraints of time and purpose. This is the overarching concern of a true

craftsman. Delivering a well cooked, aesthetically pleasing pizza to the customer, in a timely and efficient matter, is the end product of a true craftsman. The ultimate challenge is to achieve the desired quality in a time efficient matter, while respecting the other constraints that may exist. Perfection, for perfection's sake, is not the objective here, unless it is the specified outcome for the project (like in a particular time and materials situation).

5- Openness and Desire to Share

This is a trait that is often overlooked, yet absolutely crucial in the make up of a true craftsman. Such people willingly share their knowledge with others. They do not view their knowledge as a finite quantity, which should be hoarded. To the contrary, they view sharing as a way to enrich and reinforce what they already know and grow further in their knowledge in the process.

6- Passion

Passion is a difficult concept to describe with words. When we see it in someone, we know it instinctively. Where there is passion, there is energy, enthusiasm and a positive attitude. To someone who is a witness, passion is exciting and inspiring. As work becomes a vehicle for self-expression and a means to serve the needs of others, passion begins to shine through that person. Passion is the result of engaging one's heart in the work process. Without it, someone can only be a good “technician”, not a true craftsman.

Summary and Challenge

When you look at your employees and notice someone who displays a love for one's work, has a desire to learn everything he/she can to improve one's competency, has a focus and intensity, strive for excellence, is willing to share with others and exhibits passion, you have on your staff someone who is a true craftsman. As a business owner, you have the opportunity to not only help nurture the development of that person's further mastery, but also their capacity to lead and mentor the development of others.

How many people like Fernando would you like to have in your company?

Now, taking it a step further, what if you developed a hiring system to help recruit people who share those traits? What if you developed training systems that helped all your painters become true craftsmen? What would be the impact and payoff of making such changes on your company, your clients and your brand in the marketplace? This is the opportunity and the challenge facing all business owners today.

We live in a world where craftsman-like attitudes about work are rare. What if more organizations embraced and nurtured their people in the ways of craftsmen?

A Live Example

In 2007, as President of the Craftsmanship Forum, I put together a proposal to create a new national award for PDCA, called the L.E. Travis Jr. Craftsman of the Year Award. PDCA's Board of Directors approved that proposal in August of 2007. Since then, there have been six awards given to deserving craftsmen across the country.

This year's recipient is Steve Scanlan, one of my employees at Painting in Partnership, Inc. Steve had this to say:

“Craftsmanship only happens when all those fundamental traits come together. The challenge is unifying them on a daily basis. For me, being energized and engaged is probably the most important aspect of craftsmanship, because without the energy, nothing can come together. I believe craftsmanship is a life long endeavor and a work in progress. There are setbacks along the way, but believing in the prospect of doing things well, in a timely manner, is the key.”

You can read more on Steve's background in the awards section of this issue of *DECO Magazine*. Up to six awards can be given every year. I invite you to take PDCA up on this exciting and unique opportunity to celebrate the best craftsmen in your companies.