



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,

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including ones in India, New Zealand, Asia, Europe, South America and across North America. He advocates the use of the right tool for the right situation and has sought unconventional ways to apply tools and techniques."

Perhaps most importantly, Menzer added, Hoisington has successfully advanced the acceptance of quality by senior executives through demonstrating its financial value—for example, computing the value of customer satisfaction, customer retention and defect elimination.

Kappele: SPC and DOE

For William Kappele, president of Objective DOE in Bellingham, WA, the word "unsung" may now have to be deleted from "quality hero," because four people wrote in singing his praises.

For example, Hank Kozlowski of DSM Thermoplastic Elastomers in Leominster, MA, wrote that thanks to Kappele, statistical process control (SPC) has been institutionalized at his site. "Several years ago, Kappele spent a week here teaching SPC to everyone associated with our manufacturing and logistics departments. During that time, I often scanned the audiences, and no one ever fell asleep!"

Robert Johnson, research associate at Applied Research Group in Elgin, IL, concurred about Kappele's teaching methods. "He's a quality leader because a central theme of Math Options is making math user friendly. Kappele has expended great effort to ensure concepts are clearly conveyed without the use of obscure jargon or the need for extensive calculations. After all, that's what computers and software are for—to do the hard work!"

"I nominate Kappele as an unsung DOE hero, not only because of his knowledge of the subject but, more importantly, his ability to successfully transfer this knowledge to other quality professionals," wrote John Raffaldi, senior test engineer for Micro Encoder Inc. in Kirkland, WA. "He judges his success on the success of those he has trained. His methodology brings DOE from the cryptic dark ages and a field of specialization to a tool that can be used by any quality professional."

Lou Veiga, who works in employee development at Lexmark International in Lexington, KY, said Kappele has taught classes at Lexmark for more than four years. Veiga has followed up by auditing students' work. "If a student practices the skills taught in the classes, the expected average return on investment for this training is more than 70%. Our products go to market faster and are of higher quality. This means under the right set of constraints, quality is free and then some."

Lawton: Customer Satisfaction

Robin Lawton of International Management Technologies Inc. (IMT) in Bradenton, FL, was lauded by several readers as a quality hero in customer satisfaction.

"The Louisville and Jefferson County (KY) Metropolitan Sewer District's (MSD) association with Lawton has considerably advanced our ability to satisfy customers, improve products and bring about sustainable change within our organization," wrote Pat C. Kirk, who works in MSD's quality improvement department. "One of our product improvement teams (trained and facilitated by Lawton) was recognized in 2003 as a finalist in ASQ's Team Excellence Competition."

Michael Mosby, group leader in the property management division of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in Livermore, CA, praised Lawton's customer centered culture. "It's the best methodology I have seen for developing and fostering an organizational culture of customer focus and dedication. Lawton's innovative viewpoints and directly applicable techniques make noticeable and immediate improvements," Mosby wrote.

Bruce E. Laviolette, corporate director of management systems, Naval Air Systems Command, wrote about using Lawton's methodology at the Naval Air Depot in Cherry Point, NC. The depot was the first Department of Defense facility to become registered to ISO 9000. "Since then, we have incorporated the customer centered culture tenets, which we call C3, to help us focus and reinforce our efforts to better serve the war fighter," Laviolette wrote. "Operation Iraqi Freedom featured several of our products."

Ling: Automotive Reliability

Jing Ling, senior technical specialist at DaimlerChrysler in Detroit, is an "outstanding individual, a man of uncommon graciousness and definitely worthy of mention," according to Tom Klempay, lead electrical engineer at DaimlerChrysler. "I've worked with Ling since 1997 and seen his professionalism and achievements shine."

An ASQ Senior Member and certified quality manager, quality engineer and reliability engineer, Ling serves on the examination review committee for the reliability certification. He has been an MBNQA examiner, is a member of the *Quality Engineering* review board and served with DaimlerChrysler's inaugural quality and reliability conference in 2000, Klempay said.

"Ling has demonstrated his vast knowledge on numerous projects at our company, such as leading a team of engineering supervisors to develop reliability

guidelines for structural components and systems to be used corporatewide," Klempay wrote. "He established and taught a reliability engineering in product design and development course to more than 250 DaimlerChrysler engineers and managers."

Mazu: In the Trenches

"Mike Mazu has been in the trenches improving product quality for more than 20 years, first at Goodrich and then at Alcoa," wrote Richard A. Kirchhoff, director of quality and ABS systems at Alcoa Flexible Packaging in Richmond, VA. Mazu, an ASQ Fellow and regional director, currently works as a manager in Alcoa's corporate quality group at its Warrick operations in Newburgh, IN, where he's responsible for deploying and mentoring all Alcoa plants in process management.

"Mazu not only developed a quality system that has become Alcoa's standard, but he has also mentored, taught and encouraged along the way, both within Alcoa and ASQ," Kirchhoff said. "He has instilled in operators to engineers the responsibility for ensuring customer needs are met by controlling the manufacturing process from the raw materials to final critical customer product attributes."

But the main reason Kirchhoff believes Mazu deserves recognition is his ability to focus on the financial soundness of quality. "He convinced Alcoa management quality was not a theoretical pursuit but a business necessity. He is unequivocally an unsung hero because of his unselfish desire to see quality being deployed and his willingness to share his vast knowledge in a way that makes business sense and positively impacts the bottom line."

Moore: Breath of Fresh Air

According to Bob Grant, Shaw Industries in Dalton, GA, one of the largest manufacturers of carpeting and broadloom flooring in the world (a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway), has its own quality hero: KK Moore. "As our senior Master Black Belt (MBB) and personal development manager, Moore is a fantastically dynamic woman. She came to our company about four years ago to jump-start our Six Sigma initiative, which, at the time, was still in the toddler stages," wrote Grant, a corporate quality engineer and MBB at Shaw.

"Her arrival was much like her personality—a breath of fresh air through which a flaming arrow blazes toward the bull's-eye. She has quietly and confidently driven and fine-tuned our methodology and curriculum to the point at which I would consider our Six Sigma roadmap and the 'belts' that travel through

it among the finest and most productive around," Grant added.

Perez-Wilson: Motorola Pioneer

Mario Perez-Wilson started his quality journey at Motorola as head of the statistical methods department, where he helped develop and implement Six Sigma. After seven years there, he founded Advanced Systems Consultants (ASC) in Paradise Valley, AZ. ASC customizes quality systems based on variation reduction. Perez-Wilson is currently ASC's president and CEO.

Nicole Ryan, sales and marketing director for ASC, elaborated on Perez-Wilson's contributions to the quality field: "He has authored seven books and trained more than 18,000 people all over the world. He has inspired CEOs, executives, directors, managers, engineers and operators alike to pursue quality improvements using simple tools as well as advanced applied statistical methods."

Ryan added that Perez-Wilson has consulted, trained and implemented his methodologies in companies from industries ranging from semiconductor to aerospace, automotive to defense.

Tiburtius: Quality Culture in India

"This is about an unsung quality hero who I think has made substantial contributions and dedicated his life to inculcating a quality culture in India," wrote Pramod Nettur, deputy general manager of quality systems for MTL Instruments in Chennai, India. The hero is Barnabus Tiburtius, who worked for 36 years in process control before entering into a joint venture with MTL, a world leader in manufacturing intrinsically safe process control instruments.

"Tiburtius' passion for quality and perfection is the driving force that made MTL's Chennai manufacturing facility world-class," Nettur said. "He could train and motivate his team to a high degree; his humanistic approach was appreciated by all."

Nettur added Tiburtius has received recognition for his work in technology and management, including the 1993 Indira Gandhi National Excellence Award for contributions to technology.

Please contribute

If you know of other unsung heroes of quality, please send their names and the reasons you believe they deserve recognition, in 500 words or less, to editor@asq.org.