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The International Organization for Standardization has established several standardized quality certification ratings, including three separate ratings known as ISO 9001, 9002 and 9003. A company seeking ISO 9002 certification is involved in production, installation and servicing, but not design. Only companies that did all four were eligible for 9001 certification. In 2000, this designation system was eliminated in favor of the integrated ISO 9001-2000 certification, which has since been updated again to ISO 9001-2008. In order to qualify for certification, businesses must first ensure that their procedures meet the requirements of ISO 9001.

Becoming ISO 9001 certified is a rigorous process, but the benefits are well worth the effort. The benefits include increased efficiency, increased customer satisfaction, enhanced improvement processes, and increased revenue.

1. Educate yourself on ISO 9001 and what the certification entails and how it can help your business. Then make the decision to get ISO certified. The decision must come from top management because it will be a major initiative involving major commitments of time and resources.

2. Commit and allocate adequate resources. Decide if you will use a consultant, or do it yourself. A consultant can guide you through the process and speed it up considerably, but it will still take a large commitment of time and resources from the business. Also, appoint a project manager with the responsibility to manage the initiative internally even with a consultant.

3. Perform an internal audit using audit checklists available online as a guideline to establish where you are now and where you need to be to obtain the ISO 9001 certification. Determine the tasks that need to be accomplished and prepare a plan and assign tasks to get the job done.

4. Prepare process diagrams to help you visualize all the inputs and outputs of each product your company produces. The process diagrams will aid in setting up controls and documentation for each step of each process. Also, make the improvements necessary to meet the requirements for the ISO 9001 certification.

5. If possible, use existing documentation. Some existing documents will require updating or minor revisions and in other cases new documents will need to be developed. While implementing these changes you should be simultaneously building your quality management system manual. In the manual, you outline how each of the QMS requirements are met, by referring to the existing or newly prepared documents for daily tasks such as ordering, customer relations, production, R&D, quality control and so on.

6. Train the staff on the ISO process: The audit will test compliance at all levels. The staff will be interviewed by the ISO auditor, so make sure they are fully trained on the upgraded and new procedures and ensure management recognizes their role in setting examples and motivating staff.

7. Perform another internal audit to ensure there will be no surprises when the external ISO auditor comes. Address any last minute issues and, if necessary, perform a second internal audit.

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