



# WORD OF AN AUDITOR

10 TIPS FROM QUALITY EXPERTS

**Qooling**

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# INTRODUCTION

Dear reader,

Thank you for taking the time to read this e-book and a big thanks to all the auditors that took the time to participate. We interviewed 10 auditors from four different countries and from all different kinds of industries. To get a great insight, we asked them a couple of questions regarding their job.

The first question was about objectivity. As an auditor, you need to stay objective and not let your own opinion predominate. This isn't always easy, which is why we asked them how they stay objective during the audit.

Second, we touched upon the context of the organization, which is an important part of the new HLS within the standards. This part was widely introduced thanks to the new ISO9001:2015 standard which means that lots of companies needed to find a way to work with it. We asked the auditors how companies do this in practice and if they see a difference in company sizes and industries.

Thirdly, we asked about the Quality Management System as a whole, which difficulties companies have and which opportunities and threats the auditors see.

Finally, we asked if the auditor had a great tip to share with the readers.

We truly hope you like the e-book and hope you can use the information during your day-to-day job.

Happy reading.

Team Qooling

# SONYAH SPENCER

## PECB - United States

### Objectivity

There are two things I do before I walk in the door. First, I stay focused on the process and second, I stay focused on what is the risk to the customer. There is no grey area in my auditing. If anything else happens around the audit, I kind of mentally ask myself: is the process defined, what is the potential risk, what is the risk to the employee, risk to the organization and risk to the customer. Then I backtrack a little bit. I look at the organization as an end overall as itself.

### Context of the Organization (ISO 9001:2015)

Mostly the context of the organization is defined in the quality manual. In the quality manual, you get the overall business and there can be the management reveal. The management reveal tells the whole story, because a lot of times organizations think that we as auditors should be able to understand the story of the whole company. The involvement of the board with this is 50/50 right now.

Some organizations are good and some are bad. A sector where the involvement is low are automotive companies. The top-board in this sector is too busy and have too many meeting and other things to do. They don't really define their internal and external issues. Also, they don't really know what is going on on the production floor.

### Tip from the Auditor

Clients are very sneaky. So my tip is: play the role that you don't know what you're doing. But in the back of your head, you know how to get them. Next to that, know the software systems that they are working on, especially when it comes to the high-risk processes that you're auditing. And keep on asking questions to the operators. Talk to other operators than they present to you. You would be amazed at what you will find out.

When there's a high involvement, the company shares everything and you can even go to the back closet and they show you all the equipment. When they open up like that, then you know they have nothing to hide.

### Quality Management

The problem right now is that there are not enough Quality Managers. As soon as I walk through the door, I'll meet someone who's been there less than a month and they have no idea. That's probably the biggest thing. Another problem is that the standards have changed and no longer is the Quality Manager responsible. These days it is an organizational role; quality is an organizational role. Possibilities in Quality Management are when there are open Quality Management positions, so the organization needs to outsource a lot of that work.

### Difference Between Countries

There is a big difference in countries and how they operate. German-owned companies pretty much facilitate everything. Everything is written down for the organization and is more organized than in the United States. Also, there is a difference in how Quality Managers work. An example, again, are Germans. They come off pretty abrasive and I give them a little bit back. I pretty much tell them: "you can agree or disagree, but I rate the standards."

# SEBASTIAN PLAZIER

Certification body accredited by the RVA - The Netherlands

## Objectivity

Objectivity is part of your character, but in essence, there are a couple of rules. These are risks that are easily identified beforehand. One of them is don't audit a company that you have some sort of relation with. A second is to make sure you audit solely against the standard and not your own values and interpretation. The standard is what needs to be audited.

## Context of the Organization (ISO 9001:2015)

There are generally two types of companies, the entrepreneur and the manager. The entrepreneurs are the type that see opportunities naturally and try to make use of them every day. The managers are more into running the business on a day-to-day basis. The main difference is that entrepreneurs are great at identifying risks and opportunities while managers are much better at pointing down the difficulties.

## Quality Management

Quality Management comes down to what is agreed upon with the customer. Things can go wrong when you work. Companies are very good at resolving the issue for the customer, finding trends and really improving processes is a lot harder. In order to do this, a proper root cause analysis is crucial. Really drilling down to the root of why things go wrong is the best way. Don't simply blame the supplier; investigate if the supplier just made a mistake or if they have a deeper, more fundamental problem. This allows you to make the necessary precautions.

## Tip from the Auditor

Stick to the standard. The standard is pretty clear on what the organization needs to do for the ISO:900 certificate. Furthermore, stay open-minded to new ideas and let companies surprise you positively.

There are also some difficulties for Quality Management. One of these has to do with the perception of Quality Management within the company. The organization must be willing to improve and do whatever it takes to create a better product and everybody within the company needs to be on the same page. In the end, only the people in the company can do it. Another difficulty that sometimes shows is the separation between the standard and the organization. More often than not, Quality Management isn't really embedded in the organization.

# NATASJA DE JONG

De Jong Consulting en Training B.V. - The Netherlands

## Objectivity

Staying objective is a necessity because the non-conformity needs to be related to the standard. The non-conformity needs to be properly explained to the company that you audit, but also to the certifying body you are auditing for. Next to this, all non-conformities are being reviewed by third parties so someone will point out any subjectiveness. Lastly, I don't have any urge to vent my personal opinion; it is about the audit, not what I think.

## Context of the Organization (ISO 9001:2015)

For companies, it is quite a challenge to relate the context of the organization and the standard to the type of company it is and the risks associated with it. As an auditor, you can guide the company slightly by defining this context because certifying bodies only want auditors that are coming from a certain industry and have experience with the company they are auditing.

When there is a low engagement from directors, there is very low engagement from the employees. The standard has little effect on the company in such a situation. However, when directors are highly engaged, there is high engagement from the employees. In this situation, we see that the standard really adds value to the company.

## Quality Management

Quality Management is mainly about aligning the processes with the company. In this respect, I still see a lot of opportunities for Quality Managers. Currently, the main difficulties are in the engagement of the employees and having authority within the organization. This way, they are basically on their own.

I would also not recommend to set up a Quality Management system without any experience in or knowledge of Quality Management. This most often turns into a disaster.

# LUC JANSEN

## EBN Certification - The Netherlands

### Objectivity

As an auditor, you are always somewhere else. There is lots of reference material in the back of your head. Over the years, you get a good sense of how companies are thinking about the standard and in which phase of a process they are. Sometimes I do give my personal opinion, but mainly as an option for the company to reflect on things. Not every company has the luxury to talk often with specialists in the field. This isn't consulting, but it does add something to the audit.

### Context of the Organization (ISO 9001:2015)

When the ISO9001:2015 was introduced back in 2015, most companies didn't really know what to do with it. There were overthinking it a lot. I mainly translate the standard with a couple of simple questions. Who are you as a company? What is your position in the world? Involvement of top management is critical. About two-thirds of the companies I audit have a pretty high top management engagement in the context of the organization. In about one-third of the companies, this part is solely done by the Quality Manager.

These companies don't want to be the best, they simply need the certificate to keep some of their customers happy. Some companies that fall in these categories are mainly the smaller and medium-sized companies. I also see this mainly in logistics companies and to a lesser extent, construction companies.

### Quality Management

Quality Managers are generally placed too low in the organization with too little power of authority, while having too many responsibilities. When the Quality Manager has too little authority, it's quite hard to delegate actions and convince people to do things. However, when the Quality Manager is part of the Management Team, this all gets significantly easier and the job gets a lot more fun. They are then able to do the tasks that come with the job instead of just fixing everything.

I would recommend companies not to abuse lean in Quality Management. Lean is a philosophy to make companies operate more efficiently. People search for processes that are too inefficient and cost too much money or simply lead to too high of a risk. Lean programs, more often than not, are used to squeeze the last bit out of a company. This is to make a spreadsheet manager happy with great results, to get a nice dividend at the end of the year. Companies use lean for this, which is a shame.

### Tip from the Auditor

I have not one but two tips. Tip one is related to the new standards. The new standards are mostly risk-based, which is quite vague for most companies. I always try to help companies by informing the people about the new standards and how they can prepare for this. This is done per department or process to clearly describe what is happening. The auditee within the company gets a great inside of what is going on when we do it like this.

Tip two is about when, as an auditor, you have something that isn't going according to the standard. Don't give them another year to solve it; make sure they have to do it faster. This will help the company to really find suitable solutions and prevent them from lagging behind.

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# KEES DE GRAAF

## M&D Marketing (Safety) Consultancy BV - The Netherlands

### Objectivity

It's pretty difficult to stay a 100% objective as auditor because then you simply miss the point. You can't act black or white—there is always room. As auditor, you should be able to understand the situation and interpret the standard based on the situation you are in. The standard states what should be done but there is room in the standard. This makes it possible for every type of organization to be able to make the standard fit properly.

### Context of the Organization (ISO 9001:2015)

Companies have been quite busy with the new standard the last couple of years. ISO9001:2015 was introduced in 2015 and every company needed to be certified accordingly in September 2018. I have seen quite some great results at companies that have been working with the context of the organization. The standard talks about a management review, but I believe that this should be done by management and that the directors act upon the results. The directors identify objectives for the coming year based on the management review.

The involvement of Top Management is highly on the type of company. In SMEs, the management review is quite often a difficult topic. In these companies, Top Management and just management mostly consist of just one person. For best results, this should be divided among at least two different people. Within SMEs, these management reviews end into some sort of conclusion and not really into an actual plan for the upcoming year, which is what it should lead to.

### Quality Management

The current ISO:9001 is a management system. The management is the most important system in the organization. Don't call it anything else than just the company's management system. The PDCA-cycle is incorporated in every aspect of the management system. This is a continuous improvement approach. Closing this cycle consistently is a problem for most companies.

The difference between the companies that can and can't close the cycle basically comes down to how disciplined you are as an organization. To continuously be able to close the cycle, it is crucial to actively work on it with the complete organization. This will keep everybody involved and focused.

### Tip from the Auditor

Invest in employees. This should be in line with the capabilities of the organization, of course. Personally, I would put a lot more time and effort in the development of employees. Create a proper plan which challenges the employees and allows them to reach their and the companies' full potential over the coming years.

# JOHN DUNCAN

## EQS Services Limited - United Kingdom

### Objectivity

You can't let your own opinion count. That's the difference between a consultant and an auditor. It's more a consultant thing to give your opinion. As auditors we could say that something is a good idea, but you don't say something is good or bad. You don't solve the problems, but you can give ideas about the solutions of the problem.

### Context of the Organization (ISO 9001:2015)

You need to encourage organizations to document everything. How they manage the company, goals and future plans. This is important, because the context of the organization from the ISO:9001 standard is not something that is used every day. It is always good to talk to the managers of the organization. They know (almost) everything about the organization and can help with filling in the gaps. So basically you need to see commitment from the top of the company. What you see most of the time, is that many people don't understand the terminology.

### Quality Management

Quality Managers need to see that the new standard, ISO:9001:2015, is more a business improvement tool than an additional feature or just a requirement for them to do. They need to use it as a tool to improve the business. In some organizations they still see ISO as something you need for customers or for clients, but they should really use it more as a management tool. Besides that, Quality Managers are placed too low in the organization.

They don't have the authority that they need to have to run the department as it should be, which makes the job quite challenging.

When this is the case, they make it more difficult for themselves than is necessary. The trick is to keep it as simple as possible so that everyone understands it. Most of the time, the simple ways have the same result.

### Tip from the Auditor

My tip is for new auditors. Get as much experience as you can across as many industries as you can. Because that's the way you learn how different companies work. You can then identify what the standard requirements are and will see lots of best practices. This allows you to see when companies actually comply with requirements.

# GENTIAN MUCA

## Trainer and Lead Auditor in Quality, Environment, Health-Safety & FS - Albania

### Objectivity

I always respect the audit criteria to achieve an audit objective. Next to that, I try to be objective when I assess audit evidence.

### Context of the Organization (ISO 9001:2015)

So, in my experience in the organization where I do audits, most of the time, a format is used that is ready and only needs to be filled in. The organization context is obtained by an external consultant. In most of the organizations that I visit, the ISO Management System(s) is seen as a separate issue that belongs to an appointed Quality Manager.

The other managers in the organization see it as an issue that doesn't belong to them and believe it is only the Quality Manager's problem. I think that the latest version of ISO:9001 facilitates the usage of it by organizations and should result in better adoption by the company.

### Quality Management

Some of the difficulties I see in organizations is that they have challenges in differentiating between objectives and indicators. Often, they consider both as the same, in quality terms. But there is quite a difference between objectives and indicators.

There are also always possibilities in Quality Management. Up to now, I've seen that companies use certification only for tender or getting licenses, permits or other reasons. But the certification needs to be more integrated into the organization of a company.

### Tip from the Auditor

I have two tips. First, for other auditors. The audit deepness shall be appropriate to the organization and system maturity.

The second tip is for organizations. I think that it is essential that there is involvement of all levels in the organization and not only in management. Next to that, I think all organizations need to do data analysis. Because data is the future.

# ANONYMOUS

## The Netherlands

### Objectivity

Objectivity is mainly about involvement with the customer. The key is to go forward together and don't talk about business. This way, you can really look at what is best for the customer. I see a couple of different types of companies. Companies that need the certificate and only because they need it for their customers—certificate buyers. The second type are the companies that really want the certificate because they believe it will add value to the company. They also want to continuously improve the processes. This is the main difficulty you will see as an auditor.

### Context of the Organization (ISO 9001:2015)

The context of the organization strongly depends on how you look at the standard. Public utility companies, for example, take a very broad scope when it comes to the context. They don't simply look at the customer, but take a wide spectrum of stakeholders into consideration. These types of customers have very special needs.

The main difference in approaching the context from what I see depends on the sector of the company. Installation, construction and SMEs still have difficulties defining the context organization. Because of these struggles, they lack behind, for example, service companies. The reason for these struggles can be related to their main focus on technology. They approach everything from a technical angle.

### Quality Management

There are two main problems Quality Managers face. The first one comes down to the position of the Quality Manager—is it really a full-time position? Line organization with a high pressure on time and mainly focused on money, safety and time. These are the main indicators they are assessed on and make it seem like Quality Management isn't always that important.

The second problem is in the PDCA cycle. Many Quality Managers have difficulties to fully close the cycle, especially the check and act, which causes the main problem.

Next to the differences, there are definitely similarities among companies. One is the delight most Quality Managers show when the auditor comes by. Within most companies, there is only one person filling the role. An auditor is a great person to reflect on and to shake some things up in the organization.

### Tip from the Auditor

When you set up a Quality Management System, make sure it matters. A clear and concise description of the process makes the interaction between the different processes a lot clearer.

# DIEDERIK VAN DER BURG

Adburdias - The Netherlands

## Objectivity

Objectivity is, for a big part, the mindset you have. As an auditor, you audit a company to benchmark it against the standard—not to give your opinion. Next to that, it is crucial to stay open-minded for different solutions you haven't seen before. However, objectivity does have a relation with the personality of the auditor. Always keep in mind that you are the auditor, not their advisor.

## Context of the Organization (ISO: 9001:2015)

The context of the organization is a new part of the ISO9001:2015 standard, but an organization should always be involved with their environment. In this part of the standard, the risks and opportunities are an intriguing aspect. Some companies are only thinking about opportunities, while others only see the risks. There are also companies that actually think about both. Important questions to get a good feeling for the risks and opportunities are: Who are you most important stakeholders? What do these stakeholders expect from you?

There are companies that basically buy the certificate. These companies need the certificate for their customers or other stakeholders. They don't really understand how the standard works and sometimes even have the idea that they don't need the standard to optimize processes. I personally work for a premium segment of the market so I don't really get in contact with these companies—but I do think this should be forbidden.

The companies I audit treat the standard in many different ways. One clear difference can be found among sectors but also between the maturity of the company. The maturity basically has to do with the time the director puts into the job compared to delegating activities. When the director founded the company it can be hard to delegate certain tasks, this is a less mature company. In a more mature company different roles are performed by different employees.

The different tasks strengthen each other and everybody is doing what they are good at. This makes life easier for everybody, including the Quality Manager.

### Tip from the Auditor

Don't be dogmatic, with this I mean that you need to be a bit flexible. Every company is different and has a different way of working. This isn't wrong per definition, see it as a new insight.

## Quality Management

Quality Management basically comes down to how you organize the company. Quality can be lifted to a higher level when directors, Quality Managers and all other people involved are more aligned and work closely together. The other way to bring Quality to a higher level is when you look at the complete Quality Management like in the INK Management Model. This management model also includes things like leadership and service excellence.

Difficulties in Quality Management include coming down to the essence of the standard. You need to put a little bit more effort to really understand what the essence is; it will get a lot easier then.

# AGATHA ZWEERS

## A-Z Quality - The Netherlands

### Objectivity

As an auditor, you can stay objective by focusing on the intentions of the standard. When there is anything unclear on a certain topic, I always ask the company to explain in more detail what is going on without any judgement.

### Context of the Organization (ISO: 9001:2015)

In the beginning, quite some SMEs had difficulties in defining the context of the organization within the ISO9001:2015. Smaller companies handle the standard much more pragmatically. Of course, they want to comply, but always try to balance this with a workable approach. Bigger companies handle this almost completely opposite.

These companies not just comply but actually leverage the standard to structure the organization. The other big difference in the industry. The most clear difference can be found between manufacturing companies and service companies. Service companies have a big focus on customer satisfaction while manufacturers focus firstly on the production processes.

### Quality Management

The ISO-standard, and primarily the ISO9001, could be a little less vague and be more concrete and clear on certain topics. There is too much room for interpretation.

Another difficulty with Quality Managers is that they claim the quality and try to create a department for this. This way, all the responsibility is with the Quality Manager. Quality shouldn't be a department, but more embedded in the day-to-day activities of everybody. In this case, the Quality Manager has more a supporting role. A great example of a Quality Manager being responsible is with policies. Yes, the Quality Manager supports in creating the policy—but should never be responsible for the policy.

In practice we see lots of Quality Managers being responsible for the policies, while it is really the responsibility of the directors or management.

### Tip from the Auditor

Do research on the company you are about to audit. When I start the audit I always ask the person in front of me to explain what the company does. Sometimes you get an exciting story full of passion which gives great context for the audit itself.

When, during the audit, things aren't exactly going according to the standard you might be able to relate this. Sometime this exciting story is missing. When this is the case, you mostly see that people don't really understand why the company is doing what it does and what difficulties it faces.

# CONCLUSION

There are quite some similarities among the stories of the auditor. A couple of topics came up in almost every interview. The main topics are:

- ISO:9001 – but actually any standard – should be incorporated in the organization. Many auditors still notice that the company handles the standard as a separate thing decoupled from the organization.
- Most auditors bump into what they call “Certificate Buyers”. These are companies that solely need the certificate for particular customers. The company doesn’t put any effort whatsoever in the management system. Don’t be a company like this, it isn’t fun for anybody.
- The Quality Manager is generally positioned too low in the organization. Quality Management comes with lots of responsibilities and authority. When the Quality Manager is positioned too low, it is hard to have the authority in order to fulfill the responsibilities. Making the Quality Manager part of the Management Teams is a great way to solve this.

Thanks for reading the e-book, we hoped you like the information and that it will help you throughout your career.

## QOOLING

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