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SPECTRUM

FOR THE EMPLOYEES OF GE INFORMATION SERVICES COMPANY

cover story

QUALITY: IF IT'S NOT THE BEST, IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH



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Cover photo: *Morning Call, the daily forum for quality.*

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**INFORMATION
SERVICES**

General Electric Information Services Company, U.S.A.

QUALITY: IF IT'S NOT THE BEST, IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH

The Morning Call voice check begins promptly at 8:30. Ohio is present and Schenectady, and CACHA is on the line from California. Across the Atlantic comes a voice from Amsterdam, where, according to a digital read-out, the hour is 14:30. Primed to report the past 24 hours' events, the voices crackle around the thirty-odd heads in the Rockville conference room.

Client services presents all the previous day's customer concerns. The Supercenters and network organizations report on their day. CACHA informs

everyone of their progress. "Hot spots" (open items) are reviewed.

An unsuspected problem arises, sending voices back and forth in charged pursuit of the cause. Then 45 minutes after it all began, after everything has been addressed, come the sudden words, "That's it for Morning Call."

The crackle disappears, and with coffee cups in hand, so do the people. Clearly, they are on their way to handle the new day's missions.

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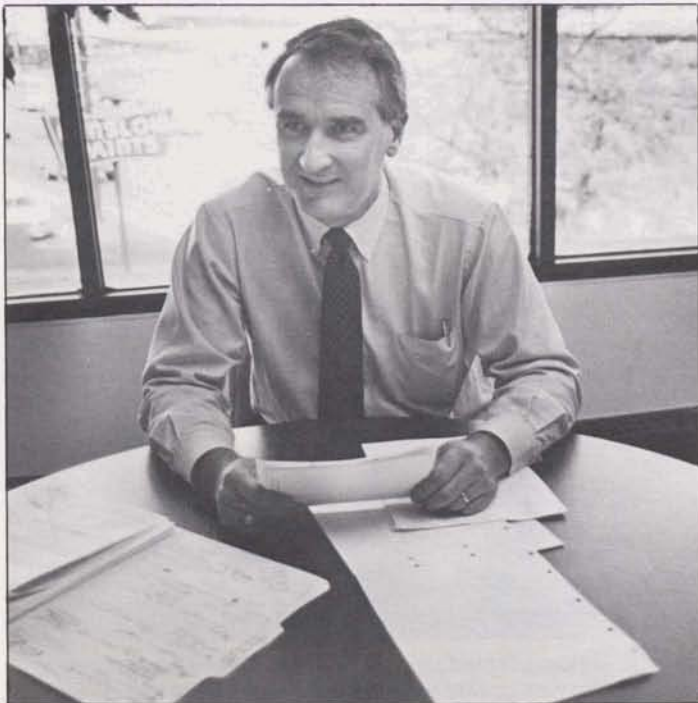


Morning Call's review of domestic and international performance is a serious, action-oriented strategy for maintaining and improving quality. Responsibility for heading this quarter's Call belongs to Mel Szot, planning and quality assurance manager for MARK III. Behind Mel, a John Ruskin quote emphasizes the goals of the daily forum: "Quality is never an accident. It is always the result of intelligent effort. There must be the will to produce a superior thing."

Morning Call is not a novel event at GE Information Services, but it is a revitalized one. For a while the daily routine seemed to be blandly attended and promptly forgotten. Now the one-room forum releases action items like flashes on the six o'clock news. The reason is simple: Quality is the number one priority.

Company President Walt Williams explains, "We seem to have developed the perception that cost control and schedule commitments outweigh delivering and maintaining a high-quality portfolio. While our net income objective *is* critical and our commitments *are* important, we shoot ourselves in the foot if we deliver an unacceptable product. If push comes to shove, we can't let quality be shoved aside. Otherwise a short-term victory becomes a long-term defeat. Our company's longstanding reputation for high-quality products and service cannot be jeopardized. If we are slipping, we must regain; if we are maintaining, we must surpass."

Walt's succinct message is "If we're not the best, we're not good enough." His words appear in large scale outside the cafeteria in the Rockville headquarters building, along with up-to-date availability charts for the network and the MARK III® and



Matt Mulligan

MARK 3000™ Services. The display is but a pinpoint of an action-oriented campaign for quality that reaches across all levels of Marketing and U.S. Sales and Technology Operations. Among the many topics being addressed in the campaign are cost, schedules, product ownership, reorganization, tests and measurements, end-to-end responsibility, and above all, the client's perception of quality.

"Good quality has to extend well beyond just hardware; it goes back to the time the product is conceived and onward until it's commercialized, supported, and delivered to the customer."

—Matt Mulligan
Client Services

Spearheading the focus on increased client awareness is client services Manager Matt Mulligan. Matt observes that "every time someone says our quality needs improving, the first thing that comes to mind is our Technology Operations hardware. This is wrong. Good quality has to extend well beyond just hardware; it goes back to the time the product is conceived and onward until it's commercialized, supported, and delivered to the customer. Start to finish, everyone is responsible for a product's success. All of us must see the quality issue from our client's perspective."

Matt considers the New Product Introduction Process (NPIP) (see *SPECTRUM*, April '85) to be a significant step by Marketing and U.S. Sales toward better quality. "The NPIP will facilitate a good portion of our back-to-the-customer focus," he says. "It's going to help us generate a quality product our people can be proud to sell."

In addition to the NPIP, Matt explains, "We're giving our sales representatives vehicles by which they can let us champion their cause and get problems resolved. Those improvements to date have been to make Morning Call more action-oriented, to restructure our weekly staff reports so that Walt and his staff can become more aware of our specific client problems, and to hold regular meetings with the quality assurance manager of each Technology Opera-

tions department. These meetings allow us to discuss any problems our clients are having and to present any feedback we're hearing from the field. So far, I've seen a greatly increased awareness of our clients' problems and a genuine desire to get them resolved. This is not a 'just for show' program, but a steadfast commitment to quality."

Matt notes that when the National Service Operation (NSO) was formed to serve a number of clients previously served by the field, some customers thought it meant our interest in them was diminishing. "For the most part," he says, "we now have a more organized response capability. Nonetheless, one of our objectives is to change any perception our clients might have that we don't care about them or about quality."

"The first way we can do this, of course, is to have a quality product. The second is to be there when they want to be heard, and the third is to resolve their problems. If it takes a while to fix a problem, then we have to stay in touch and keep them informed of what we're doing. That's why we have to know what the other departments are doing—so we can let the client know that GE Information Services' team is there for them. The customer with a complaint that is *listened* to is much more likely to continue doing business with us."

"The truth is you'd like to have a perfect program. So you set guidelines that will give you every opportunity to build and evaluate quality from start to finish."

—Cathy Michalak
Applications Engineering

A good example of how important this interdepartmental knowledge is to client services can be found in applications engineering. Cathy Michalak, a member of Steve Mudrick's quality integration and control section explains. "When a customer calls client services with an applications problem, it could be a simple snag that can be resolved immediately, like an incorrect procedure on the client's part."

"When this first line of representatives can't address the problem, they give it to a client services

specialist in that application, and usually the specialists can solve it. Sometimes, however, they cannot solve the problem either. They re-enact the customer's situation, check documentation, and maybe discover that it should work but doesn't. At that point, client services puts in a quality defect report—a QDR."

The QDRs, which become action items for the engineering quality assurance groups, are given levels based on the severity of the problem. A level-one QDR means the problem has major impact on the client; there is no workaround, and the client's business is at a standstill until the problem is fixed. "The goal in applications," says Cathy, "is to have zero level-one QDRs, and most weeks we achieve that goal."

Level-two QDRs are still serious, but the client has a workaround that at least prevents complete work stoppage. "Unfortunately, the workaround is usually an inconvenient one," Cathy notes, "and the customer is going to get discouraged very quickly if it has to be used for long."

Finally, with level-three QDRs, there usually is a fairly simple workaround the customer can do. But, Cathy explains, "it is not the way the product was designed to perform, and it still is considered a bug."



Cathy Michalak

