

The Operational Executive Sponsor

The sometimes-missing link in software process change.

In his seminal work, *Managing the Software Process*, Watts Humphrey outlined what he called “Six Key Principles of Software Process Change” [2]. The first principle was “Start at the top.” It is an axiom of process change in any discipline that, if the people running the business don’t want it, it won’t happen. In fact, if the people at the top don’t *really* want it, it won’t happen. Many of us in the business of software can point to initiatives where the commitment was not there and it didn’t work. For obvious reasons, the times when process initiatives die on the vine tend to receive less overt publicity within companies than when they work. But we do have a number of examples where major initiatives have worked and worked well.

When Art Sundry, an executive at Motorola, declared at a management meeting in 1979 “...our quality stinks” he got the boss’s attention [1]. Bob Galvin, the visionary CEO of Motorola, decided that quality was the most

important thing for the company to focus on. And then he famously acted like it was. People throughout Motorola have stories about a time when they were conducting a quality briefing on their product and Galvin himself came in unannounced and sat down. Galvin actively participated in the process to assure himself that it was working and that people were truly engaged in the change. He would also attend presentations on product development, and excuse himself once the quality component was covered saying, in effect, I trust you to manage the rest.

This level of commitment is rare, but it seems to be one of the hallmarks of truly revolutionary change. We are actually quite good at working hard to provide the people who employ us with what those

people want. That is, with what those people *really* want. We are also very efficient at filtering out the real needs from the rhetoric, and discarding or carefully deprioritizing the politically correct statements emanating from the higher levels of businesses. When the boss says “quality is the most important thing” and then overrides the quality gates to force a shipment of a product to

