



Ten Minutes of Your Time. Lasting Business Impact.

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"Quality is not just making things (to) requirements and being steadfast in insisting on doing things right. It isn't a functional thing at all. Actually it has to do with the way the company is run. It takes the combined actions of every person in the company to cause the company to operate properly."

- Philip B. Crosby

What's On My Mind This Week

Stick the Landing

By Kevin Weiss

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Because of the strength, grace, balance, and speed required, gymnastics is a focal point of the Olympic Games. With routines so spectacular from athletes so young, we cannot help but marvel at the performances. For the athletes, however, these performances are a competition. As each athlete receives the crowd's applause, judges are methodically separating the best from the very good.

To the casual fan, scoring can be a mystery. Starting values for each routine reflect its underlying difficulty, and various deductions are subtracted for mistakes. But one thing is certain, the gymnast must "stick the landing" if they want a top score.

Landing well is so basic that even first-time viewers learn the mandatory 0.1 to 0.5 point deduction for failing to "stick". And yet, commentators routinely mention the landing requirement. If the requirement is so well known, why has "stick the landing" become constantly repeated during gymnastics competitions?

The answer is simple - and surprising. Most gymnasts fail to land perfectly. More often than not, even world-class athletes land with a hop, wiggle, shimmy or outright fall. So although the requirement has been clear from their first day in the gym, the world's best gymnasts normally finish their amazing routines with a final deduction to their score.

And that has profound implications for you and me.

Exposing and diagnosing these deviations requires the attention of management, participation from people throughout the process, and leadership by knowledgeable problem-solvers. But mostly it requires a commitment to see process outcomes as the residual of the entire performance; to stop telling the organization to "stick their landing" and instead focus on understanding the true causes of hops, wiggles, and falls.

That's what happened at a large manufacturer of industrial equipment. Its customers needed replacement parts to maintain, repair and upgrade their equipment, but late parts shipments were a continuing customer complaint.

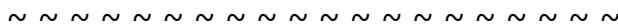
It was not because of apathy or lack of focus. Each quarter, the CEO reviewed the timeliness of parts shipments and exhorted the parts team to do better. Everyone acknowledged the issue and agreed to improve, but next quarter the process started again. A company-wide focus on quality had some impact, but other problems remained.

Then the CEO made a critical change. He made a senior manager responsible for parts shipping, and gave him authority across the organization. This manager didn't get a budget, or an assigned staff, but leveraged a common culture, tools, and problem-solving methodology that were already in place.

Very quickly, the effort identified underlying problems: the order entry process was inconsistent and inaccurate; certain parts were routinely specified and engineered incorrectly; sourcing problems caused manufacturing delays. Slowly and methodically, like a gymnast honing her performance, the entire parts routine became flawless - and fast. By eliminating problems, not only did parts flow accurately, they flowed much more quickly, lowering inventories and cutting the order to delivery cycle.

The effort was significant, but so were the rewards. Customers immediately noticed shorter and accurate response times. The company's reputation in the industry improved, impacting sales of new equipment. And customers who purchased copycat parts from competitors began buying from the original manufacturer.

Just as the gymnastics competition is tougher every Olympiad, the global marketplace increasingly differentiates between companies that are flawless and those which are very good. No serious gymnast would state that her routine was perfect except for the landing, and yet we constantly say some variation of this statement about our business routines. Until we consider our landing as the test of our entire performance, we'll hop, wiggle, and shimmy through the day, while our customers decide to "stick" with our better-performing competitors.



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Take Ten Minutes

Consider your current processes and answer the following questions:

- Where does my organization fail to "stick" on a consistent basis?
- What will it take to identify and eliminate the upstream causes of our downstream issues?
- In what ways would solving these problems benefit the organization?

Ready to Take the Next Step?

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About *Take Ten Minutes*

Take Ten Minutes is a weekly publication of [Philip Crosby Associates](http://www.philipcrosby.com) and [The Capability Group](http://www.the-capability-group.com).

The premise behind *Take Ten Minutes* is simple: take ten minutes out of every week to refocus and recommit to business improvement. *Take Ten Minutes* features quotes and interviews to inspire you. We also pull articles from today's headlines as examples of the power of the preventive culture (or the deep problems caused by not having one).

As the name suggests, *Take Ten Minutes* is relentless with the editing razor and keeps each issue tight - each issue should take you no more than ten minutes to read, start to finish. You'll reap even bigger rewards if you kick in an extra ten minutes to discuss the ideas with a colleague or to take an idea found here and plan to roll it out in your organization. We hope *Take Ten Minutes* becomes the business improvement equivalent of your running partner, providing the inspiration you need to lace up and "just do it" on those weeks when the couch seems oh-so preferable.

We hope you enjoy *Take Ten Minutes*. As Philip Crosby said, improving your business "is a journey that never ends." So let the journey...*continue!*

Please send story ideas or comments to our [editor](#).

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