CONFORMANCE

Conformance at the manufacturing level is a subset of the overall quality definition. Manufacturing quality means conformance to requirements. Requirements include drawings, procedures, specifications, workmanship details, plus fitness of the product for the intended use. A simple definition of manufacturing conformance says:

Conformance is obtained when manufacturing follows an unbroken sequence of operations from beginning to end for successfully meeting the requirements. All things produced must be in agreement and harmony with the requirements. Economics of conformance require making products right the first time and every time. Product conformance always involves cost and scheduled deliveries.

This definition for conformance says it is right or it is not right for shipment. In manufacturing, when products conform, we ship them. If products don’t conform, they fail the quality test and we must rework, repair, sort good from bad, or scrap the product. We can’t ship nonconformances “as is”. Conformance sounds like an internal requirement, but it is not. Customers set external standards when they buy an advertised product. Costs and schedules are also important product conformance items. As a consumer, do you want to spend more and receive your purchase later than meets conformance to your requirements?

Conformance by sorting good product from bad is a terminal manufacturing illness. The sorting approach is better than nothing—but not much better. Waste from the sort-and-suffer philosophy is insidious. Sorting begins with the best of intentions, but the results are costly. A better manufacturing method is: “Do it right the first time”.

Sorting-and-suffering brings out firm, but silly, “justifications” for an indefensible position:

1. We’ve never had a problem before!
2. No one ever told me this is wrong, and I’ve been making this part for 5 years.
3. Don’t tell me I’ve got a problem after I’ve made 1,000 pieces!
4. They told me it was OK yesterday, and now you’ve changed your mind today.
5. What’s 0.001 inch between friends?
6. How can you be so sure about the drawings?
7. I worked hard on this. Don’t scrap it.
8. If you scrap this, we’ll miss the delivery schedule and cost the company big $’s.
9. Ship it, no one will ever know it’s bad.

These are ugly admissions of nonconformance dressed for sale—not for consumption. It’s human nature to deny personal involvement in a problem. However, manufacturing efforts require personal effort for correcting problems so we all benefit by improving our productive output. Before you can ship the product, it must conform to the requirements.

The English language contains many euphemisms. Euphemisms substitute nice words for offensive or unpleasant words. The factory floor has few pleasantries and many plain speaking folds. We don’t deal in a phony world where almost is good enough. We follow the ancient Latin phrase: Esse Quam Videri (To be, rather than to seem to be.) Pretending all is well, when it isn’t, suits fairy tales—not the manufacturing environment. We want product conformance without pretensions and sweet sounding (but misleading) words.

Conformance has no conscience. Conformance doesn’t mean altering, accommodating, adjusting, or altering principles or specifications as if they were made from rubber. Conformance simply means making parts to the requirements. Conformance doesn’t require “more than” or “less than” drawings specify. Conformance is black or white. Conformance is the responsibility of the machine operator who is the only one who can produce conformance—no one else. Conformance responsibility doesn’t pass to inspectors. Inspectors are like historians—they report what was done. Historians don’t make history. Only the heroes on the manufacturing floor control the results. How you get conformance is important and conformance involves both accuracy and precision.