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Interview with David Luther

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David Luther

(Interviewed on 7 April 1992, Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

Video Roll # 20

Q: Let's talk about Dr. Juran. I know that you were careful to articulate that, that yours is a relationship of a certain kind.

LUTHER: Well, it is. Dr. Juran was on the Board of Overseers of the Baldrige affair. And I spent four years as a judge of Baldrige. And we had meetings with these overseers.

And one of the things that he said, I thought was terrible insightful, had to do with the Cadillac' Award. I don't know if you're familiar with a Cadillac Award, but that was not, initially, widely heralded as the most insightful decision Baldrige ever made. I mean, we had a fair amount of static over that.

But I feel very good about the Cadillac decision, because I think its circumstances are playing out that was the right thing to do. They are virtually sold out, or capacity. They've won the major automotive awards in the United States.

And Dr. Juran said, at the time -- and I thought, gee, what a great thought -- that Baldrige is a view of the future, not of the past. So many of our measures of quality are a function of what you remember about the past. And he said the

Baldrige process isn't like that. The Baldrige process is, in fact, predictive.

And that's exactly what happened with Cadillac.

And I've always been impressed with his ability to sort of knife through all of the great commotion that surrounds quality. To come up with insights like that to help those that are trying to make something go.

Q: Do you recall the first time you physically met with Dr. Juran?

LUTHER: Well, I had seen him at a distance on a stage. But I think the first time was, in fact, around the Baldrige process. And it's interesting, because the Board of Overseers, are made up of some pretty personalities.

And as is the case when you get a group of powerful personalities together, it's tough to get a word in edgewise. I mean, these people are used to talking and not listening particularly. And he listened a great deal. He listened.

And as I looked around the room -- and there were some pretty capable people in the room, and they were all giving their views. And he was noticeably quiet. And then, later on in the meeting, he came out with, you know, here's four things you all ought to be interested in.

And somehow it gathered together all of the insights that had been laid on the table, to date, and put a couple more on that added depth to the whole subject.

Q: Are you comfortable in giving us an answer to: what is Dr. Juran really like?

LUTHER: I don't know if I'm the right person to ask. Everyone's got -- almost everyone's got various facets they ~ to various people.

{ I just see a guy who's very, very concerned about the country and where it's going. Concerned about what the quality contribution is to it.

And I think -- he wrote a piece called: A Break in the Clouds. Which I thought was just terrific. And I think he composed it on the spot at one of the excellence conferences for Baldrige.

But his was the first voice in America that I know of that started sounding somewhat optimistic about our ability to actually win in the marketplace. And this was about three years ago, I would guess, maybe four years ago. Maybe in '88 or '89, where he had seen the winners of Baldrige talk about what they were doing, and he had the closing remarks of the conference.

And he got up and said -- his comments were: hey, these companies are doing some pretty neat things, and I think they're going to make a difference.

Q: There is a great deal -- actually, our hope is that this documentary on the life of Dr. Juran will find a home on PBS or the equivalent. An awful lot of people have no idea who is Joe Juran. He's not an Isaac Stem or Leonard Bernstein or even Albert Einstein. If you get an opportunity to call a PBS station manager in New York or Los Angeles, who is saying: who, what, who wants to watch. Why should the American public be interested, do you think, in the program?

LUTHER: I think there's a very reason for it. And time is on our side in this one. If you look at the quality movement in the United States, it's starting to really get outside of the private sector. There's substantial interest now in the education sector. The health care area is starting to pick up a great deal on it.

More and more people are aware of the power of quality, and more and more are trying to apply it to their particular area.

In fact, I think, one of the brightest outlooks of quality in the United States isn't in the private sector; it's in the public sector, education, and other areas.

And so if you were the station manager and you were calling me to ask why I thought that would be important, I think I would describe to you all of these other communities out there that are trying to make quality work, in some very difficult problem areas. Health care and education are probably two of the thorniest issues in America today. And using quality to address some of those issues is a very powerful notion.

And so if you were the producer, I think I would try to convince you that you could be at the leading edge of this effort to bring the story of Dr. Juran and the story of quality to people who might not ordinarily be interested.

I think there's a bigger audience than one might imagine.

Q: In 50 years, if you were called upon to write this chapter of Joseph Juran's contribution to life in America, or even life in the world. What would your chapter say?

LUTHER: Well, I think -- I had a boss once who said that he was surrounded by one-note kinds of people. And his job was to play a symphony and he had one guy coming up and saying, it's a C, and the other guy comes and says, that's not a C, it's an F. And he never knew who to believe .

. And so credibility, for any advisor, is absolutely essential if he or she is to make a difference. And I think one of things - { probably the key contribution of Dr. Juran hasn't been in **ffis** methodology, particularly, although that's been very powerful and very attractive. I think it's been in his credibility with senior managers, that says, here is something we ought to be looking at. Here's what you need to move forward. That if you don't follow some form of quality approach, you're going to start moving to the wrong end of the food chain.

And I thiif that whole issue of believability is what he brought to the whole area of quality, convincing senior executives that this is something they ought to be after.

*Q: A potentially unfair question that you may want to not deal with. Dr. Demming has gotten an enormous amount of publicity of late. To the extent that people think that **if** it has to do with quality in the world today, Dr. Demming is the person who did it. Clearly, Dr. Demming has made significant contributions to the world of quality. How would you explain what Demming has contributed and what Juran has contributed?*

LUTHER: Well, I think you have to be careful talking about everybody who says Dr. Demming -- or even Dr. Juran

-- put the whole show together. The leading edge kinds of activities today, I think, are occurring in a whole lot of places where people are finding their own way.

I think what they do is look back and look at the principles laid down by both and say, hey, some of these apply and some may not. But I don't think they are following -- I may be wrong in this -- but my sense is the leading people are not following a recipe for quality. They're designing their own.

So I think they would thank these founders for their original ingredients. And for the whole concept of making something happen. But, in fact, they're finding their own ways as a means for moving forward.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President.

(END OF PORTION OF TAPE 20)

