



**In my opinion...**

**DEAN SAYS:**

***The Marks of Professionalism,  
Part IV—  
Commitment to Excellence***

What are those qualities that clearly make one individual appear professional when compared to his or her peers?

We began three issues ago with a discussion of the quality of "compassion." Two issues ago, we discussed the quality of a strong sense of "justice." Last issue we shared some thoughts on the subject of "common sense." This time I want to suggest that among those key items which point to professionalism is an overwhelming "commitment to excellence."

Excellence has been a very popular topic for motivational speakers and writers during the last half-decade or so. Countless books, newspaper articles, magazine features and many, many speeches have been made about the quality of a commitment to excellence. Even the military has taken up the theme with the snappy jingle that accompanies action-packed video extolling the virtue of a soldier's career: "Be all that you can be, in the Aaaaarrrrrr-meeeee."

And yet, everywhere we go we bump straight up against a host of people who day in and day out perform at some level below a standard of excellence. It

took me four phone calls, speaking each time to a different travel consultant recently to try to get the large national travel agency that I am forced to use to process my ticket as a full-coach fare. I finally got the ticket in the mail today and, you guessed it, one segment of the ticket is **not** coded as a "Y." I wanted to scream, but then thought better of it.

I eat far too many meals at McDonald's, purposefully choosing smiling Ronald over the people who want me to "have it your way." My standard order is two cheese burgers with extra cheese and extra onions and a medium diet coke.

"Would you like fries with that?"  
"Are they free?" I have learned to ask.

"No, of course not!" is the startled reply.

"Then I guess I'll just stick with what I ordered," I respond.

After my food is delivered to the car, what do you suppose I find in the bag when I open it? Well it varies, but only about one-third of the time do I get two cheese burgers with extra cheese and extra onions. I have even watched a grill person in the Cincinnati Airport McDonald's announce my order correctly as he lays the wrapped burgers on the stainless steel burger trough, repeated by the order taker as she slides them into the bag, only to discover no extra cheese and no onions whatsoever when I sit down to eat the burgers. And, of course, I don't just sit down to eat, I sit down to

eat with great anticipation.

Somewhere in this chain of events from order taker to grill person to shift supervisor to store manager, someone or maybe several someones do not have a commitment to excellence.

Is it so very different in the fire alarm and burglary alarm business? When some poor soul calls and says he or she needs a fire alarm system, does a mechanism in your company kick in to assure that all along the chain of events from the moment of this initial call until the system is installed and fully acceptance tested, every person who becomes involved with the system has a commitment to excellence?

Now I'm certainly not just talking about lip service. Practically everyone I know gives lip service to the importance of a commitment to excellence. No, I'm talking about a group of "can do" people deciding it is worth their while to do it with quality materials in a quality manner and to do it right the first time.

Customers truly do want the best job possible. Even if they are operating with budget restrictions, they still expect that whatever they buy will be installed properly with care and attention to detail.

In fact, a commitment to excellence impacts significantly on the false alarm problem that has given fire and burglary alarm systems such bad names. If you are committed to providing the best system you can, and are further committed to maintaining that system in top condition throughout its useful life, then by your commitment to excellence you have taken an important step in the process of eliminating false alarms.

So how does one internalize this particular mark of a professional? The commitment to excellence seems to come either as a result of several very painful lessons where a failure to perform in an excellent manner resulted in a disaster, or it comes from a personal value that determines where others err, you will not.

Whichever force motivates you, I would encourage you, and myself, as well, to actively seek to cultivate a commitment to excellence. Somehow I can't help but think that such an attitude will reap many, many rewards. □

**The Moore-Wilson  
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