

OPENERS

SURE, THE QUALITY MOVEMENT TURNED OUT TO BE A FAD, AS DOES PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING THAT GETS LABELED A MOVEMENT. But the impulse, and the effort, were absolutely on target: Aim to *get it right the first time*, with zero defects, and you won't hemorrhage goodwill and money fixing it later.

In many areas of modern working life, though, the whole get-it-right-the-first-time idea seems antiquated and obsolete. As manufacturing becomes ever leaner, ever more of us spend our days (and mornings, and nights, and weekends) doing knowledge work that, more often than not, has no endpoint or finished product. Increasingly, the products that our organizations create and sell are digital—and subject to constant revisions, additions, and upgrades.

Not only is *right* harder to define—so is *the first time*. More and more products are rolled out slowly, in different versions, and never actually get finished. Software—in computers and, now, most other things as well—is only the most obvious example, demanding almost constant updating. One could generously see this as continuous improvement—or as indicative of a time in which both consumers and workers are learning to live with instability and uncertainty.

It's a shift that has gone mostly unnoticed but affects all of us. Surely the move away from actual, fixed products and services has left more workers feeling unmoored, with nothing concrete to hold, or behold, at week's end. It's harder to take pride in your work when that work is amorphous and subject to change at a moment's notice—and it's easy to feel nostalgic for the days when the goal was to get it right.

Why does this come to mind? Because we've been working on tcbreview.com more lately, making it more interactive, with multimedia content, online-only feature articles, and links absolutely everywhere. Currently many more people read *TCB Review* on paper, as they have since our founding in 1976, than do online. But at some point—a year? two years? five years?—that will surely change. Like every other periodical, we'll put more time into the version that's browsed on iPads and smartphones. Readers will look up archived features online rather than clipping them from bound copies.

And what that means is that the digital version, not the paper version, will eventually be the official, permanent one.

In many ways, bound volumes and daily papers and quarterly magazines are already beginning to seem like the transient media. Editors are prioritizing speed and volume over getting it right the first time, for good reason—winning the race to post a tweet or article or video clip can mean all the difference in grabbing readership. The price: regular typos and sloppiness in the print editions of formerly unimpeachable periodicals. (*The New York Times Magazine* and *The New Yorker* were, until only a couple of years ago, blemish-free; now glaring errors pop up in every issue. C'mon, people: *Buffett*, as in Warren, has two t's.)

For now, however much work we put into the website, *TCB Review* is very much still a print magazine, published in a format that complements both the articles and the way people read them, or so we're told. And even when we do make the shift and focus more on other media, we promise to at least try to get it right. The first time and always.



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