

THE IMPORTANCE OF A 'WAIVER' BY NOMPUMELELO NGCOBO

MORE OFTEN, ASSESSORS GO INTO A FACILITY AND FIND THAT THE PERSONNEL MAY STATE THAT THEIR AIM IS TO RECEIVE ZERO NON-CONFORMANCE AND TO THE PERSONNEL'S SURPRISE A NON-CONFORMANCE IS RAISED. THAT MAY CAUSE AN UPROAR AND THE PERSONNEL MAY THEN GET ENRAGED AND CAUSE TENSION. IT IS VITAL TO UNDERSTAND THAT SOME FACILITY MAY BASE THE SUCCESS OF THE ASSESSMENT ON THE NUMBER OF NON-CONFORMANCES RAISED DURING THE ASSESSMENT WHICH THEY MAY COMPARE WITH DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS WITHIN AN ORGANISATION OR FROM THE OUTCOME OF PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT.

As an assessor you may obviously know that the success of an assessment is not based on the number of non-conformances raised and as we may quite often emphasize this during the opening meeting that the number of non-conformances is not an indication of whether the facility is not performing or it is performing well. It is important that facilities know the purpose of an assessment and the value which assessments should add to the facilities management system.

The target set by the facility's top management or even at times by the individuals themselves may sometimes weigh heavily on the personnel and at times the outcome of the assessment may be used in performance appraisals or reviews of the personnel. This type of pressure is addressed under clause 4.1 of the ISO 17025: 2005 and 15189 standard which warns against undue pressure which may be placed on personnel to not receive non-conformances.

Raising a non-conformance in the facility is not an attack against any one and does not indicate any wrong doing on any personnel's side it does however indicate that a gap in the system has been identified

which affects the entire system. By addressing the gap then a system is able to improve and flourish.

The second difficulty that assessors face is statements such as "the previous assessor accepted this and it has been like this for more than twenty years". It is important to emphasize the waiver during the closing meeting.

To explain a waiver this is the part where a lead assessor or assessment specialist will say the following statement;

"Please note that as much as we would like to cover everything during this assessment, assessments are part of a sampling exercise therefore where no non-conformances were found it does not mean that they do not exist".

That is a vital part of the closing meeting and that on its own explains to the facility why different assessments yield different results.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A 'WAIVER' (continued)

The facility cannot take the results of the assessment and conclude that the system is running smooth and therefore during the next assessment nothing will be picked up. The above statement mainly states that not all records were assessed "therefore emphasizing a sampling exercise", the assessment was based on the records that were provided as proof of implementation. The assessor does not assess all the records that were released between the time

of the facilities last contact with SANAS and up to the assessment date.

A management system of a facility is a living system where records are generated daily in order to support the implementation of the requirement of an ISO/SANS standard, SANAS, of the customer and that of the regulatory body if applicable.

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