

PEAK PERFORMANCE

**Kristin Arnold,
president of
Quality Process
Consultants,
Inc., helps
management
and executives
maximize
performance
through effective
team building.**

*by Wilma Kidd
and Marsha Vandervall*

You're cold and wet. You're in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. A loud, intimidating officer is yelling at you to show your leadership, your strength, your heart, your teamwork...show your total quality. After being barked at by officers of the Coast Guard, it is only natural to take the discipline you've learned and share it with others. The Coast Guard introduced Kristin Arnold to this concept of total quality. Her passion for total quality evolved into her own company, Quality Process Consultants, Inc. Now Kristin is the one giving the orders on teamwork and discipline – even to officers of the Navy.



Kristin Arnold

Kristin Arnold founded Quality Process Consultants, Inc. (QPC) primarily by default, but the success her company has seen is not accidental; it has come from hard work and sheer determination. Quality Process Consultants is a management consulting firm located in the Hampton Roads area of the state. The firm specializes in helping executives and management achieve maximum performance from their organizations. The process at QPC includes coaching leadership in the areas of strategic, business and project planning, process improvement, and collaborative problem-solving. "We try to design an agenda and activities to address the particular needs of each client," explained Kristin. "QPC provides unique facilitation processes that are not canned or off the shelf."

An additional service offered by QPC is facilitating the development and use of work teams within an organization. Over the years, many companies have recognized the benefits of using employee teams in reaching outstanding performance goals. The team approach used by some companies today can be viewed as an evolutionary rung on the ladder of TQM. Touted by experts as the solution to all company woes, TQM or Total Quality Management was introduced as a method for continuously improving work processes, while bonding employees in an organization with common strategies and a common goal. Teamwork and self-directed teams became prominent outgrowths of that model.

Through the work of Quality Process Consultants, Kristin Arnold is regarded as an expert in team development and process improvement techniques. Her clientele extends throughout North America and Europe, attesting to her refined skills and renowned passion for extraordinary team development.

Captain Bill Belden of the U.S. Naval Air Systems Team stated, "The teambuilding training provided to our leadership by Kristin Arnold was tremendous. She quickly focused on our specific needs and guided us to produce positive results. Her training skills are top-notch, her enthusiasm infectious, and she easily turned our skeptics (including me) into teambuilding advocates. It was the unanimous opinion of our team that Kristin's course was the best training experience in recent memory...we're still raving about it a year later!"

Kristin was selected as the Women in Business Advocate of the Year for the Virginia Peninsula in 1998, making an impressive mark in her field. However, she is the first to admit that Hampton is not a major corporate hub for the use of team strategies. Most of her work is done in larger business communities that are willing to invest in practices that reflect the diversity of their workforce. Corporations in larger metropolitan areas tend to be ahead of the curve in workforce development and practices. The difficulties of paving her way in her home community have not deterred her in any way. As she reflects on how she got to where she is, Kristin readily acknowledges that she has always been motivated by challenge.

Encino, California, a suburb of Los Angeles, was an interesting place to grow up, according to Kristin. She felt that a lot of the female population at that time specialized in perfecting their "Valley Girl" images. Kristin's mother recognized her daughter's constant quest for challenges at an early age, and suggested she explore a career in the Coast Guard. When accepted, Kristin was one of only 36 women in a class of more than 300, and one of the only 10 women to graduate. The Coast Guard Academy was in Connecticut, thousands of miles away from her home, and light years away from her cultural base. Having difficulty fitting into the Coast Guard regime, but with her mind always set on finding the positive in all adverse situations, Kristin soon found enjoyment in training the other recruits. And, through the Coast Guard, she was able to obtain a great deal of outside training in management principles, and became the first Coast Guard training facilitator as it launched its initial programs in TQM.

With a hectic Coast Guard routine and an equally hectic training schedule that often included nights and weekends, Kristin also managed time for a personal life, marrying a fellow Coast Guard officer. Somewhere during that busy time in her life, she also managed to earn a master of business administration degree from St. Mary's College in California. She is very quick to praise her husband and his family for their support, and she also acknowledges that her husband's family is the reason they have remained in the Hampton area. With her busy travel schedule, it is not always easy to fit in the karate and piano lessons of her two children, ages 7 and 10, so having the extended family as a support system is very important to her.

As Kristin further reflected on the history of her company, she admits that she would have done things a bit differently if given another chance. Quality Process Consultants was started six years ago when Kristin decided to branch out on her own and not just continue training through the Coast Guard. While it had been in the back of her mind for some time, the real push came when she received a major assignment and needed a letterhead for communicating with her new client. It was easy to come up with a name because through her work she lives and breathes the concept of quality. As Kristin emphatically stated, "I know what I would want as a client, and I try to make sure my clients receive nothing but the best from me and my staff."

She is rigorous about the quality of the work that is released from her firm. Most of the client facilitation is actually performed by Kristin, but she is just as stringent about those who work for her, making sure that employees and other consultants have the same high work ethics as herself. As she persistently reminds her clients about the importance of planning, Kristin hammers the point by admitting that taking her own entrepreneurial plunge would have been preceded by a little more plan-

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ning had the situation not been so immediate. But she still revels in the success of it all since the pieces seem to have fallen into place.

Kristin realizes now that the next phase for her company is establishing itself in the Hampton Roads area. A major milestone for QPC has been the purchase of "The Arnold Building," located in the quaint Queens Way area of Hampton. Originally located in another section of town, and scheduled for demolition, the building was moved by a group of individuals who recognized the beauty of its structure. What Kristin first saw was more than a hulled out structure with no floors. She saw a vision. She saw an opportunity to establish her company as a long-term presence in the community, as well as an opportunity to provide clients with a prestigious business atmosphere that would accommodate their meeting needs.

A major feature of the Arnold Building is the "Antoinette Room." Named after her grandmother (whom Kristin describes as the entrepreneur extraordinaire for managing a catering business since Kristin was a little girl), the Antoinette Room offers the ultimate meeting amenities. Within this meeting facility, clients are pampered with top-notch services from the staff, expert technology assistance, free local and toll-free calling, and

even gourmet coffees and teas. Patrons often compliment its environmentally conscience set-up, which limits the use of paper products and other disposable items. The room was designed by a professional meeting facilitator who knew what was needed to produce an environment that would help relax attendees, enhance productivity and stimulate creativity. As with all other efforts initiated by Kristin, she is driven and determined to make the Arnold Building, with its Antoinette Room, a resounding presence in the Hampton Roads community.

Kristin does not want new business owners to think that starting and running your own business is an easy process, where following a step-by-step formula insures success. She has had her share of setbacks and has come to learn that sometimes it is necessary to fail in order to succeed - if you learn from those failures. She tells her staff that it is all right to make mistakes and move forward, for they will never learn if they are immobilized by the fear of failure. "To do nothing is far worse than to fail at trying" is a theme that is constantly repeated at her firm.

Maybe she doesn't have a crystal ball to see the future, but Kristin Arnold has done her homework and knows the trends to expect in her area. While the team concept is not yet mainstream in Hampton Roads, market research indicates that the approach is eminent. And when it gets there, Quality Process Consultants will be ready to take the lead. EY