

[The W. Edwards Deming Institute Blog](#)

Large List of Quotes by W. Edwards Deming

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The [W. Edwards Deming quote database is searchable](#) and provides [quotes arranged by topic](#).

See [our quotes overview page](#) for important background information.

Also see quotes from:

- [The New Economics](#)
- [Out of the Crisis](#)
- [Articles and videos](#)
- [Dr. Deming quoting others](#)

The [Seven Deadly Diseases](#) and [14 points for management](#) are also frequently quoted.

The following quotes have been approved as accurate in conveying Dr. Deming's thoughts by The W. Edwards Deming Institute, but have not been sourced yet (we will add sources as we find them). Many of these quotes are from the 4 day seminars, other seminars and consulting visits with companies. Members of The W. Edwards Deming institute board, and others who were consulted, worked with Dr. Deming at the seminars and consulting visits. There are also contemporaneous notes from seminars that were used to confirm quotes.

Many of the questions listed, are questions Dr. Deming would ask executives while consulting for their companies. And others are questions he would ask to participants in his seminars.

[I included notes](#), after the quotes, when I thought they would aid understanding.

3% of the problems have figures, 97% of the problems do not.

A rational prediction has an explanation based on theory.

A rule should suit the purpose.

All anyone asks for is a chance to work with pride.

Related: "Give the work force a chance to work with pride, and the 3 per cent that apparently don't care will erode itself by peer pressure." Out of the Crisis, page 85.

Any manager can do well in an expanding market.

Any two people have different ideas of what is important.

Are we noted for quality?

Are you in favor of quality?

Used when speaking to executives and in seminars.

Best efforts will not substitute for knowledge.

similar ideas: “Best efforts are essential. Unfortunately, best efforts, people charging this way and that way without guidance of principles, can do a lot of damage.” Out of the Crisis, page 19.

Build quality in.

By what method?

In Out of the Crisis and many places in The New Economics.

“Change the rule and you will get a new number.”

This is concerning the importance of [operational definitions](#) in collecting data. Without them the data is suspect. Change the definition and the data changes. And when you don't have a written definition the different opinions of those collecting data result in muddled data.

“If you change the rule for counting people, you come up with a new number.” pages 104-105 of The New Economics

Competition should not be for a share of the market—but to expand the market.

Confusing common causes with special causes will only make things worse.

See: [Knowledge of Variation](#) and page 358 of Out of the Crisis.

Divide responsibility and nobody is responsible.

Does experience help? **No!** Not if we are doing the wrong things.

Every theory is correct in its own world, but the problem is that the theory may not make contact with this world.

Similar to “[All models are wrong but some are useful](#)” by George Box.

Everyone is a customer for somebody, or a supplier to somebody.

Forces of Destruction: grades in school, merit system, incentive pay, business plans, quotas.

Similar ideas on page 122 of The New Economics

A goal without a method is nonsense.

For Quality: Stamp out fires, automate, computerize, M.B.O., install merit pay, rank people, best efforts, zero defects. **Wrong!!!!** Missing ingredient: profound knowledge.

Hold everybody accountable? Ridiculous!

See: [The aim of leadership is not merely to find and record failures of men](#)

I am not reporting things about people. I am reporting things about practices.

If someone can make a contribution to the company he feels important.

If you destroy the people of a company, you do not have much left.

If you do not know how to ask the right question, you discover nothing.

If you stay in this world, you will never learn another one.

Related to: “Every theory is correct in its own world, but the problem is that the theory may not make contact with this world.”

Improve quality, you automatically improve productivity.

Information is not knowledge. Let’s not confuse the two.

“Information is not knowledge.” on page 106 of The New Economics

Innovation comes from people who take joy in their work.

Innovation comes from the producer—not from the customer.

Similar to ideas on page 7 of The New Economics. The quote is a bit different but it is easy to see the quote being said by Dr. Deming based on the source quote in the book. I have included similar pointers to sources in the book that provide context for the quote.

Is price the price tag or the total cost?

It does not happen all at once. There is no instant pudding.

Similar ideas on page 126 of Out of the Crisis.

It is a mistake to assume that if everybody does his job, it will be all right. The whole system may be in trouble.

It only takes a little innovation.

It’s management’s job to know.

Judging people does not help them.

Similar ideas on page 248 of Out of the Crisis, “[leadership is not merely to find and record failures of men](#), but to remove the causes of failure: to help people to do a better job with less effort.”

Knowledge is the key.

Lack of knowledge...that is the problem.

A leader knows who is outside of the system and needs special help.

A leader must have knowledge. A leader must be able to teach.

A leader’s job is to help his people.

Let us ask our suppliers to come and help us to solve our problems.

Manage the cause, not the result.

Management by results is confusing special causes with common causes.

Management does not know what a system is.

Management of outcomes may not be any more than a skill. It does not require knowledge.

Management's job is to improve the system.

Similar ideas on page 50 of The New Economics

Management's job is to know which systems are stable and which are not.

Management's job is to look ahead.

Management's job is to optimize the whole system.

Similar ideas on page 50 of The New Economics

Managing by results is like looking in the rear-view mirror.

Managing by results only makes things worse.

Meeting specifications is not enough.

“meeting specifications not sufficient” page 485 of Out of the Crisis

Monetary rewards are not a substitute for intrinsic motivation.

Nobody should try to use data unless he has collected data.

You need to understand the potential pitfalls of collecting data. You need to appreciate the importance of operational definitions which is hard if you haven't collected data.

Off we go to the...Milky Way!

4 day seminars. Similar ideas on page 194 and 200 of The New Economics.

Our customers should take joy in our products and services.

People are entitled to joy in work.

People care more for themselves when they contribute to the system.

People learn in different ways: reading, listening, pictures, watching.

Similar ideas on page 52 of Out of the Crisis and page 108 of The New Economics

People need to know how their job contributes.

People need to know what their jobs are.

Similar ideas in Deming Library video, 3 minutes and 35 seconds into the video [“It is no good to tell someone to do something when he does not understand why...”](#) I would not know what to do if you do not

tell me why.” Depending on why different actions/solutions are appropriate for the worker.

Plants don’t close from poor workmanship, but from poor management.

Similar ideas on page 17 of The New Economics

Precise optimization is not necessary. It would be too costly.

Price is not the only cost.

Quality starts in the boardroom.

“Quality is made in the board room” page 202 of [Dr. Deming: the American who taught the Japanese about quality](#) by Rafael Aguayo

Ranking. What good does it do?

4 day seminars

Rational behavior requires theory. Reactive behavior requires only reflex action.

Retroactive management emphasizes the bottom line.

Shrink, shrink variation—to reduce the loss.

Stamping out fires is a lot of fun, but it is only putting things back the way they were.

Sub-optimization is when everyone is for himself. Optimization is when everyone is working to help the company.

The aim should be to work on the method of management.

The customer invents nothing. New products and new services come from the producer.

Similar ideas on page 7 of the New Economics

The emphasis should be on why we do a job.

The individual has been crushed by our style of management today.

The main difference between service and manufacturing is the service department doesn’t know that they have a product.

The merit system will put us out of business.

The problem is that most courses teach what is wrong.

The process is not just the sum of its parts.

The result of long-term relationships is better and better quality, and lower and lower costs.

The transformation will come from leadership.

There is a penalty for ignorance. We are paying through the nose.

There is no knowledge without theory.

Similar ideas on page 63 of The New Economics, also see: [Experience Teaches Nothing Without Theory](#)

There is very little evidence that we give a hoot about profit.

See: [Nobody Gives a Hoot About Profit](#)

There must be consistency in direction.

Understanding variation is the key to success in quality and business.

See:
[Knowledge of Variation](#)

We are being ruined by the best efforts of people who are doing the wrong thing.

See: page 19 of Out of the Crisis and [Deming's Second Theorem: "We are being ruined by best efforts."](#)

We are here for an education.

4 day seminars

We are Here to Learn, to Make a Difference and to Have Fun.

4 day seminars, [see blog post – with video of Dr. Deming](#)

We are here to make another world.

4 day seminars

We can do something about our problems, or we can continue the way we are.

We do not know what quality is.

4 day seminars

We have to bring back the individual. Management has smothered the individual.

We know what we told him, but we don't know what he heard.

We must satisfy our customers.

4 day seminars

We must understand variation.

4 day seminars

We should be guided by theory, not by numbers.

Similar idea: “In other words, the management are guided by theory, not by figures. They are wise.” page 63 of The New Economics

We should work on our process, not the outcome of our processes.

We want best efforts guided by theory.

What makes a scientist great is the care that he takes in telling you what is wrong with his results, so that you will not misuse them.

When a system is stable, telling the worker about mistakes is only tampering.

See: [Dr. Deming on tampering](#) and the next quote

When a worker has reached a stable state, further training will not help him.

“A manager of people knows that in this stable state it is distracting to tell the worker about a mistake.” page 126 of The New Economics. At that point the limits to improvement are the system, improvement efforts should focus on improving the system.

When people try to do what they can not do, they wish to give up.

When we cooperate, everybody wins.

“The reader may note that the result of every example of cooperation is that everybody wins.” page 90 of The New Economics

“Whenever there is fear, you will get wrong figures.”

[Where There is Fear You Do Not Get Honest Figures](#)

Why aren't there enough napkins in the world? Is it a matter of distribution?

Without questions, there is no learning.

Without theory there is nothing to modify or learn.

Similar ideas on page 103 of the New Economics

Without theory we can only copy.

Similar ideas on pages 19 and 316 of Out of the Crisis and page 103 of the New Economics

Work to the optimum. When you depart a little, there is a little loss. Depart further, suffer more loss.

You can not achieve an aim unless you have a method.

Similar ideas on pages 19 of Out of the Crisis

You can not hear what you do not understand.

You can not plan to make a discovery. You do not plan innovation.

You can see from a flow diagram who depends on you and whom you can depend on. You can now take joy in your work.

You do not find knowledge in a dictionary, only information.

You do not install knowledge.

You do not install quality; you begin to work at it.

See: [The Quick Fix – instant pudding](#) and page 138 of Out of the Crisis

You have one chance to train a worker...only one so don't muff it.

You must have a supplier relationship of constant improvement.

You should not ask questions without knowledge.

You should not tamper with the process.

Zero defects is a super highway going down the tube.

See pages 139-141 of Out of the Crisis and [Zero Defects](#)

A quote [I like and that I think](#) it is reasonable that Dr. Deming said it, but I am looking for a source: "In God we trust, all others bring data." See [comment](#) making the case that this is from George Box or Bernard Fisher (and look at my response to that comment).

A quote that is **incorrectly** attributed to W. Edwards Deming: "you can't manage what you can't measure." In fact he repeatedly said the opposite ("It is wrong to suppose that if you can't measure it, you can't manage it – a costly myth." page 35 of The New Economics) and [running a company on visible figures alone was one of Dr. Deming's 7 deadly diseases](#).

8 Comments



1. *tim higgins* says:
[April 16, 2015 at 2:36 pm](#)

@ it is reasonable that Dr. Deming said it, but I am looking for a source: "In God we trust, all others bring data."

Shared at the end of this comment is what source information I found for the statement. One attribution is to [George Box](#) and another to Bernard Fisher.

I have searched and not found the statement in any of Deming's work. I have contacted people who worked closely with Deming, and none of them heard him say it; and all of them believe it conflicts

with many of his other statements. One (a statistician) claimed “He never would have said that.”

I did find on the web that Trevor Hastie, Robert Tibshirani, and Jerome Friedman, co-authors of *The Elements of Statistical Learning* in their Preface to the Second Edition have a foot note which reads: “On the Web, this quote has been widely attributed to both Deming and Robert W. Hayden; however Professor Hayden told us that he can claim no credit for this quote, and ironically we could find no ‘data’ confirming Deming actually said this.” Trevor Hastie, Robert Tibshirani, and Jerome Friedman, co-authors of *The Elements of Statistical Learning* in their Preface to the Second Edition have a foot note which reads: On the Web, this quote has been widely attributed to both Deming and Robert W. Hayden; however Professor Hayden told us that he can claim no credit for this quote, and ironically we could find no “data” confirming Deming actually said this. Tibshirani responded to my inquiry saying that if I found the source, he would like me to share it with him.

Here are two sources I have found [neither of them Deming].

On p 27 of a paper (by Dr Kathy Lusk, Dr Myron Tribus and Carole and David Schwinn) based on presentations made at the William G Hunter Conference, Madison WI 19 April 1989. The paper was revised in 1998 by Dr Tribus. Its title is *Creating Community Quality Councils: Applying quality management principles in a political environment A Template for Creating a Community Quality Council*.

In the end, the wisdom of Professor George Box’s admonition was demonstrated: “In God we trust. All others bring data.”

Also:

on page 200 of *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer* by Siddhartha Mukherjee [won the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction]

It reads:

The implicit nearly devotional faith in a theory of cancer was finally put to a test. “The clinician, no matter how venerable, must accept the fact that experience, voluminous as it might be, cannot be employed as a sensitive indicator of scientific validity,” Fisher [1] wrote in an article. He was willing to have faith in divine wisdom but not in Halsted as divine wisdom. “In God we have trust,” he brusquely told a journalist. “All others [must] have data.”

[1]Fisher is Bernard Fisher Chair from 1967 –to 1994 of the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project (NASBP).

So **not** Deming; perhaps George Box, perhaps Bernard Fisher.

[Reply](#)



o [John Hunter](#) says:

[April 16, 2015 at 8:58 pm](#)

Thanks for your comments. I still believe Deming could have said it, I am nearly certain he at least repeated it. Though it is possible I remember George Box saying it and over the years got the source confused.

To those that say the quote isn’t completely consistent with Deming’s full management system I would completely agree. Dr. Deming clearly stated numerous times the limitations of data.

Does that mean he wouldn't make a two sentence quote that emphasizes the importance of data in a humorous way? No. It is difficult to source many modern quotes where they are said much more frequently than they are found in books.

And the variations become even more difficult to source. It is hard enough to know who to source 3 similar quotes to separated by many decades in books. Is the later one different enough to consider it original or did they just slightly tweak what someone else said a long time ago? When you don't have written text (or audio or video or etc. sources) to base the sourcing on it gets really tricky.

Even if, for example, Myron Tribus et. al. quote George Box saying it, whether George originated it or not is questionable.

I agree there isn't evidence enough to say, Dr. Deming said it or originated the quote. Like you, I have looked and haven't found it. I also asked a group who knew Deming well and they couldn't provide a source for it (I think I may have said they didn't believe he said it and several believed he said it but were not at all certain he originated it). I am not convinced by those that believe he not only didn't originate it but he wouldn't use it. I just think people that believe he wouldn't use that quote are wrong, but of course it could be me that is wrong.

I do think your text is helpful to those trying to learn the origin of the quote. Thanks for sharing that information.

I think it is a wonderful quote (and like nearly all quotes not completely true).

It is [too bad George died a couple years ago or I would ask him what he thought](#), my guess is he would point to some similar quote that is more than a century old as a sensible source, but it is a shame I can't ask him.

[Reply](#)



2. *Philippe Pruvost* says:

[March 17, 2016 at 4:45 am](#)

The following quote is attributed to Deming : “Without data you’re just another person with an opinion”, but it seems to contradict his positions about theory.
Have you any clue about this quote ?

[Reply](#)



3. *John Hunter* says:

[March 17, 2016 at 6:56 am](#)

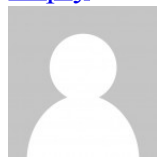
I don't have a source for Dr. Deming saying “Without data you’re just another person with an opinion.” I think it is possible, using the same logic I explained in the comment above.

Dr. Deming understood we were missing huge opportunities to use data to improve. He also understood the limitations of data. Even though the quote does conflict with some of what he said it is a humorous and engaging way to encourage people to use data. I would not be at all surprised if

Dr. Deming used the quote.

Of course, he would acknowledge that the quote had limitations. If he used it, he did so to encourage people to think about using data when they missed such opportunities. Not putting in any effort to use data was amazingly frequent in the 1980s and 1990s it is still frequent, but much less so than it was then – it is one area we have improved on over the decades. w. He would, of course, have understood if in this situation data was not going to be useful (in the same way I mentioned above).

[Reply](#)



4. *Charles Postma* says:

[May 20, 2016 at 11:20 am](#)

In regards to ISO certification:

I recall Dr. Deming stating that we should be careful regarding pursuit of ISO certification, to not let it become a “distraction” to product improvement and increasing market share. Did he say that?

Thanks!

Chuck

[Reply](#)



5. *David Schwinn* says:

[December 11, 2016 at 11:57 am](#)

Regarding Tim Higgins sourcing regarding “In God we trust, all others bring data,” he cites p. 27 in the paper Kathy Lusk, Myron Tribus, Carole, and I did on “Creating Community Quality Councils” for the 1989 Hunter Conference. Interestingly, i couldn’t find a p. 27 in my copy of the paper or the quote, but I am intrigued that it could have come from me.

You see, I have used it for years...before I met Dr. Deming. It came from a sign on the desk of Warren C. Tyner, Chief engineer of the Climate Control Division of Ford Motor Company. I first saw it in 1972. Where Warren got it, I do not know. It seems possible that Dr. Deming, if he used it at all, may have also seen it on Warren’s desk as he wandered around Ford in the 80’s or he may have picked it up from our paper as Tim suggests.

[Reply](#)

6. *Data Driven Planning: Planning for Efficiency - Outlier AI, Inc.* says:

[June 30, 2017 at 1:03 pm](#)

[...] Quote of the Day: “Sub-optimization is when everyone is for himself. Optimization is when everyone is working to help the company.” W Edwards Deming [...]

[Reply](#)

7. *The Conundrum that is Dr. Deming on Metrics, Measures, and Data - Lean Blog* says:

[July 12, 2017 at 3:02 am](#)

[...] W. Edwards Deming Institute has a page full of Deming quotes, context, and citations here and

a more interactive databased of [...]

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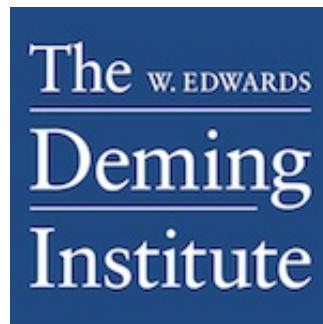
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