

WILD About Testing

WILD
& Associates

Volume 3, Issue 5
December 2011

A newsletter aimed at certification professionals interested in continuously improving the certification experience for their certificants and other stakeholders (employers or government agencies that might use the certificate).

From the Editor

This week brings in a new year – 2012! Each year I make a resolution for Wild & Associates, Inc. In 2011 I resolved to provide more ways for clients to learn about excellence in certification. To meet my resolution, I added an occasional blog, a workshop *Improving Certification*, and gave a workshop at ICE.

My 2012 resolution grows out of suggestions from participants in the workshops and from you – my loyal readers! Participants in my *Improving Certification* workshop suggested that they would like an opportunity to benchmark best practices in certification programs with other certification professionals. The ICE workshop participants told me that the benchmarking in the workshop was tremendous. You, my faithful readers, are always telling me how helpful the e-zine can be. Based on your feedback and support, my resolution for 2012 is to *provide more opportunities for clients to learn about excellence in certification and to learn about best practices from each other.*



*Dr. Cheryl Wild
President
Wild & Associates, Inc.*

What are some of these opportunities to learn about excellence in certification?

1. *Building Quality Communications to Improve Stakeholder Relations*, a session on February 27th with Dania Eter (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc., NCSBN), Georgia Patrick (The Communicators, Inc.), and Cheryl Wild (Wild & Associates, Inc.).
2. *Benchmarking Day for Improving Certification* for clients, workshop participants, and e-zine subscribers only on March 28, 2012 in Longboat Key, Florida. **Let me know right away if you are interested in attending because the hotel needs an estimate of numbers** (e-mail me at cheryl@wildandassociates.com).
3. *Improving the Quality of Your Certification Program: A Learning and Planning Experience* March 26th and 27th, 2012 in Longboat Key, Florida (again, e-mail me or go to <http://www.wildandassociates.com/improving-certification/> to read further about the workshop).
4. *The IQ Blog* (Improving Quality with Cheryl Wild) at: <http://www.wildandassociates.com/blog/>.

Whether or not you are a New Year's resolution kind of person, I invite you to take another step toward providing extraordinary services for your certification clients in 2012. Continue reading my e-zine for articles aimed at certification professionals interested in continuously improving the certification experience, attend one or more of my workshops, read my blog, or hire me to help.

These services are for you and are possible because you have been so helpful in providing questions, suggestions, and support. Please keep up the good work and continue to contribute your ideas and content through interviews and online (right on my website at www.wildandassociates.com). Let me know what is on your mind and what you would like me to write about next.

In This Issue

Outsource Your New Year's Resolutions to Your Customers

Not Broken or Just Not Working?

ANSI/ISO/IEC 2012 Is Coming!

In the News

From the Editor (continued)

When I attend meetings or workshops, participants are excited to learn about my e-zine and wish they had heard about it sooner. You can help with this – click the “Forward to a Friend” button on the bottom of the e-mail that brings each issue to you, or just spread the word and ask them to go to my website and subscribe.

What is in this month’s issue?

The first workshop for 2012 and the first annual **Benchmarking Day for Improving Certification** are announced in this issue! Due to my consulting schedule, the workshop *Improving the Quality of Your Certification Program: A Learning and Planning Experience* is scheduled now only to be offered once, March 26th and 27th. The workshop sold out in February of 2011 – learn more about it below. This retreat is a quick way to learn about quality tools and plan how to apply them to your organization.

The first free annual Benchmarking Day for Improving Certification (for clients and e-zine subscribers only) will be March 28th – e-mail me immediately if you are interested (cheryl@wildandassociates.com). The hotel needs a count of the number of participants.

Please enjoy this month’s articles:

1. **Outsource Your New Year’s Resolutions to Your Customers.** Wild & Associates, Inc.’s 2012 New Year’s resolution came directly from my customers. Did yours? Do you have the two-way communication necessary to know what your customers need and want?
2. **Not Broken or Just Not Working?** I was recently informed that my seat belt wasn’t broken – it just didn’t work. Certification organizations sometimes have procedures that aren’t broken but don’t always work – a few examples are described.
3. **ANSI/ISO/IEC 2012 Is Coming!**

Enjoy the newsletter and share it with your colleagues. Please use the “Forward to a Friend” link and help me reach out and find everyone who can benefit from years of great experience, which I am delighted to share.

Outsource Your New Year’s Resolutions to Your Customers!

The December 27th issue of the *Wall Street Journal* has an article entitled **“To Stick to New Year’s Resolutions, Try to Outsource Them.”** They are talking about outsourcing the identification of resolutions – not necessarily the implementation of the resolution. (I read the article because I thought it would be so great to be able to outsource implementation – oh, well.)

The Wild & Associates’ resolution for 2012 came directly from our customers to *provide more opportunities for clients to learn about excellence in certification and to learn about best practices from each other.*

Communication is a key tool to learn directly from your customers. Unfortunately, we often think of communication as a one-way street – we will tell

the certification applicants and holders what is needed. The important half to the equation – listening to what your customers need from you – is often overlooked.

The workshops, where I was face-to-face with customers, were a very important tool for me to learn customer needs. Communication is a two-way street and as professionals, we need to not only talk to our customers but to listen and understand our customers. More than listening, we need to act proactively on what we hear. In the case of my workshops, I heard that certification professionals needed an opportunity to



Outsource Your New Year's Resolutions to Your Customers!

(continued)

discuss best practices with best practice certification organizations.

What could I create to help achieve this benchmarking? **A free workshop!** How can I assure that only best practice organizations will participate? **By limiting participation to clients, workshop participants, and e-zine subscribers!**

How can you, in a certification organization, listen to your customers and understand how to proactively act on what you hear? Sometimes it is helpful to see examples of how this can be done.

This February at ATP, Dania Eter (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc., NCSBN), Georgia Patrick (The Communicators, Inc.), and I (Wild & Associates, Inc.) will be conducting a session on *Building Quality Communications to Improve Stakeholder Relationships*.

During the session, we will discuss how well-planned and executed communications programs are critical ingredients to building quality. This

session will present examples of how the quality of your testing program can be improved using effective communication.

Examples will include identifying stakeholder groups, consistently building communication messages across multiple communication vehicles (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, newsletters, focus groups, e-mail), identifying communication needs, and planning to whom and when the message/communication will occur. To assure that communication is effective, a quality program will also provide feedback loops and ways of measuring effectiveness. Ideas for measuring the quality of your communications will also be discussed. At least three case studies using feedback loops and measuring the effectiveness of communication will be provided.

This workshop at ATP is an example of one of the free services of Wild & Associates, Inc. Read further to learn about the Four Ways to Go Wild on page 5.

Not Broken or Just Not Working?

I was recently out doing an assessment and staying at a local hotel. The hotel shuttle kindly took me to and from the client's office two days in a row and picked me up afterwards. It also took me out to dinner and the airport. Very nice service, except it wasn't safe!

The first time I tried to use my seat belt I couldn't find the latch in the seat to connect the shoulder strap and waist belt. Not trusting unknown drivers in big cities, and assuming the seat belt must work, I asked how to use the seat belt. The driver informed me that the buckle was just down under the seat and maintenance would have to pull it up before I could use it. I asked when they would get it fixed and the response was, "Oh, it isn't broken – you just can't use it right now." And "now" lasted at least for all three days of my visit.

Despite the hotel's willingness to cart me all around the city, this customer wasn't satisfied. To me, the seat belt was as good as broken. Although the driver had heard my complaint, he didn't take it as anything he had to take action to correct. It had become such a commonplace event that no action was taken to fix the situation.

This is so natural for us human beings – to live with things as they are and not recognize their impact on others. Could it be that certification organizations have situations when they assume things aren't broken? Situations when to the customer the process looks broken and yet the certification organization doesn't recognize it as broken?



Not Broken or Just Not Working? (continued)

Unfortunately, in my travels and in discussions with certification and testing professionals I know that there are often “parts that can’t be used” by customers when the certification organization thinks these same “parts” aren’t broken.

Some examples in the certification environment include:

1. Registration procedures that make it difficult for the examinee to schedule their exam.
2. Long wait periods from taking the test to receiving (or being denied) the certification decision.
3. Slow response to recertification applications.
4. Lack of response to complaints about test questions.

Let me explain each of these in a little more detail and describe how there are perfectly logical reasons these problems occur.

Registration procedures are required for every certification program and registration procedures vary considerably. In some organizations, an applicant can register for the exam, find a test site, and obtain the date, time and location for taking the test easily on a single website. Often, though, it isn’t that easy.

Example 1 is based on a program that requires the examinee to call the test center to schedule their exam. Each test center only has a fixed number of telephone lines. During peak testing periods, all the lines are busy. Test centers may not even know how many calls don’t get through. And if the test administration is outsourced, the certification organization may not be told about difficulties in scheduling. From the certification organization’s perspective, registration isn’t broken. The procedures are there for registration; there isn’t a problem during off-peak times. But if the problems are difficult enough, registration problems may discourage certification candidates from pursuing certification or may encourage them to investigate other certification organizations that are more “user friendly.”

In the second example, long wait periods from the time you take the test until a pass/fail decision is made most often occur for performance exams that have to be scored by external raters. Oftentimes, it is most efficient to bring raters together and to do the scoring of all the performance examinations simultaneously. This can mean the examinee may not receive their results for two or three months or more. From the certification organization’s perspective, the scoring process isn’t broken at all – it is scheduled to take a long time. However, with computer-based testing, waiting any more than two or three weeks is now considered a “long time.”

Setting expectations for when results will be available and explaining the importance of fair and valid scoring procedures to the examinee can help the public relations aspects of the problem. Certification organizations may also want to review their scoring processes to see whether the scoring process can be more efficient.

In the case of recertification applications (example 3), certification programs often have peaks and valleys of work. Many applicants for certification may receive certification over the summer, for example, after they graduate from school. That means most recertification applications come in the summer when your staff may be on vacation – creating the most work when the least number of people are in the office. From the certification organization’s perspective, the methods for handling recertification applications may be working during 10 months of the year, but two months are very difficult. **Certification organizations can plan for these eventualities and prevent problems in several ways – staggering recertification due dates, training temporary staff to help during the peak times, shifting staff responsibilities.**

The fourth example has to do with handling complaints about test questions. Many certification organizations do not respond to individuals who complain that a test question has no correct answer, multiple correct

Not Broken or Just Not Working? (continued)

answers, misprints, etc. Often, examinees are told that “although your feedback concerning the examination will be reviewed, you will not receive any feedback concerning your comments.”

What would you think if you sent in feedback to the telephone company and said your telephone wasn't working and they didn't respond? You would think you were being ignored, even if the phone started working again eventually. **When examinees don't receive a response to a complaint (even a letter acknowledging receipt of the complaint), they will also assume the same thing unless you proactively take some sort of action.**

Do you look at complaints and take action on them? Do you provide any communication to the examinees about how you handle complaints? Even generic answers that say the number of complaints received per year and what actions were taken give credence to the idea that complaints are reviewed and handled.

Examinees appreciate handling comments confidentially and in a timely manner. They can understand that all comments don't need

individual responses, if there is evidence that comments are being reviewed and acted upon.

There is a lesson to be learned from situations like those above – situations when certification programs weren't working for their customers yet the problems weren't really recognized by staff. **It is often helpful to have an outsider come look at your organization in order to help identify areas for improvement.**

One of the services that I provide is an internal audit of your program. During this review, I evaluate your program against standards, give guidance on what standards you are meeting, what standards you aren't meeting, and provide opportunities for improvement – areas where you may be meeting the standards but might improve.

You may hear me talk about the four ways to go Wild – ways to benefit from my experience in helping hundreds of certification and accreditation professionals. An internal audit is an example of a limited engagement.

Here are the Four Ways to Go Wild:



Now that you have experienced the thinking and words of Cheryl Wild, Ph.D., would you like to know other ways to benefit from her 30 years of helping hundreds of certification and accreditation professionals? **Here are the Four Ways to Go Wild.** The more you put into the relationship, the more you will get out of it.

- (1) **Free:** Subscribe to the e-zine, read Cheryl's blog, attend her presentations at ATP, ICE, ASAE and many other industry meetings.
- (2) **Workshop and Book:** Call Cheryl to discuss your participation in the two-day workshop retreat by the beach. Buy her book.
- (3) **Limited Engagement:** Call Cheryl to discuss issues and concerns you are struggling with that could be addressed in a limited consulting engagement as short as one month to as long as six months.
- (4) **Wild's Signature Engagement:** Call Cheryl to discuss operational issues that need expertise and process improvements that take six months or more to produce results necessary, plus buy-in needed along the way.

www.wildandassociates.com

ANSI/ISO/IEC 2012 Is Coming!

I just returned home from Geneva and the final meeting of the international working group to revise the ANSI/ISO/IEC 17024 standard. (The title of ANSI/ISO/IEC 17024 is *Conformity Assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons.*) Cynthia Woodley of Professional Testing, Inc. did an excellent job chairing the committee and working to achieve consensus among the multinational representatives. Roy Smith from the American National Standards Institute and Sharon Goldsmith also participated in the meeting from the United States.

Since this is the final meeting, it means the standard should be published by the summer of 2012 and there will be a two-year transition to the new standard. During this time assessors will be trained on the new standard, currently accredited programs will be trained on the new standard, and then programs interested in becoming accredited to the new standard will be trained.

My evaluation of the revision is that the standard has many positive changes, making it easier to understand from a certification body's perspective, easier to evaluate from an assessor's perspective, and an important standard for conformity assessment from an international perspective.

There will be much more written about the standard in the next months – from my perspective important changes include:

- **An addition of guiding principles** to help explain the underlying values and expectations of the standard. The certification bodies will not be evaluated against the guiding principles (only the standards themselves).
- **An expansion of the quality management section of the standard** is more explicit about the responsibility of top management for reviewing performance and initiating improvement, the management review must include safeguarding impartiality, and requirements of auditors.
- **An explicit authorization for the scheme owner to be different than the certification body.** An example in the United States would be the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), a government agency that has developed the schemes for four certification programs and will be allowing certification organizations to use these schemes to develop certification programs.
- **Greater emphasis on security issues** both in the security section and through other concepts that enhance security (e.g., confidentiality, defined test administration procedures, outsourcing, and personnel including examiners).

There will be much more to come in future issues about the changes to the standard.

Benchmarking Day for Improving Certification

March 28, 2012 ■ Longboat Key, FL

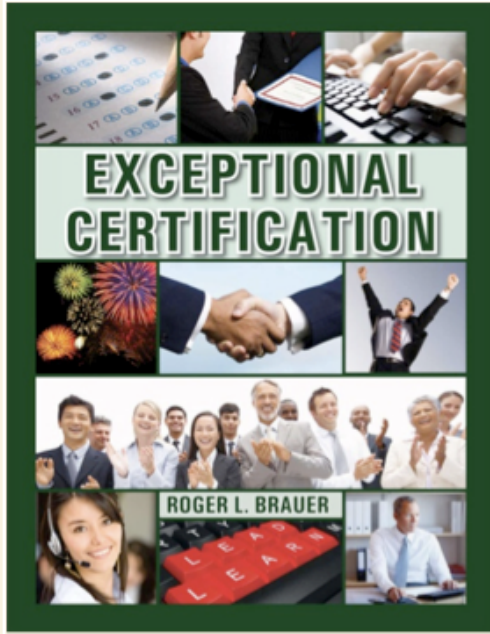
FREE for clients, workshop participants and e-zine subscribers. (See page 8 for more information.)



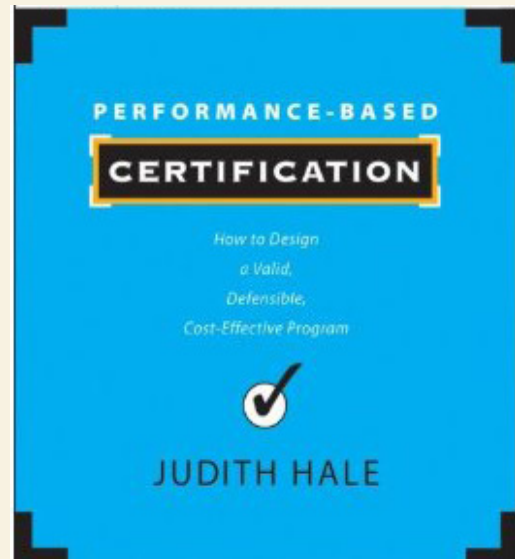
In the News

There are several new books that are of interest to my readers:

Exceptional Certification by Roger Brauer is now out. It includes all the bodies of knowledge needed to develop a quality certification program.



Performance-Based Certification: How to Design a Valid, Defensible, Cost-Effective Program by Judith Hale is now available. The book includes a number of examples, guidelines and checklists. It is not strong on topics related to accreditation.



Some of my readers have been asking where they can meet me...

- **Association of Test Publishers meeting February 26-29, 2012** at the Westin Mission Hills Resort & Spa in Palm Springs, California
- **Improving the Quality of Your Certification Program: A Learning and Planning Experience** March 26 & 27, 2012 in Longboat Key, Florida
- **Benchmarking Day for Improving Certification**, March 28, 2012 - **FREE to clients and e-zine subscribers only**



An Invitation

Do you have questions you would like to see discussed in the Frequently Asked Questions column?

If so, please contact me at cheryl@wildandassociates.com

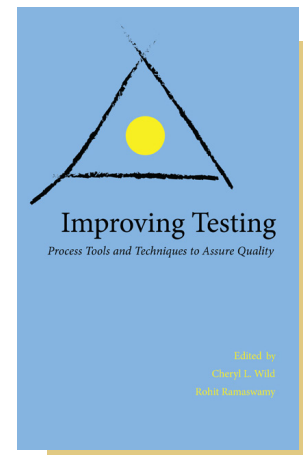
Improving Testing: Applying Process Tools and Techniques to Assure Quality

Would you like to learn more about the tools for designing an effective process? Would you like to learn more about standards that apply to the certification industry?

If you attend *Improving the Quality of Your Certification Program: A Learning and Planning Experience*, you will receive a copy of this book as part of your registration fee (and you will read parts of the book in preparation for the workshop).

Not sure yet whether you are interested in the workshop? You may want to order a copy of the book and read some chapters to learn more. This best-selling book was reviewed in *CLEAR Exam Review* and cited as "a valuable addition to the reference bookshelf which covers a number of topics not well represented elsewhere in the testing literature."

For more details go to: www.wildandassociates.com/read-improving-testing/.



February 26-29, 2012
Westin Mission Hills Resort & Spa
Palm Springs, CA

Innovations in Testing 2012 promises to be an exciting and informative program designed to facilitate the exchange of ideas, best practices, research and applications for the testing community.

From interactive workshops, keynote addresses, and information-filled breakout sessions and innovation showcases, to networking opportunities with attendees and exhibitors, this conference offers the breadth and depth of content that professionals need to remain current with the evolving testing and assessment industry.

For more information go to:
www.innovationsintesting.org

Benchmarking Day for Improving Certification



Participants in my Improving Certification workshop have suggested that it would be very beneficial to have an opportunity to benchmark best practices in certification programs with other certification professionals.

Based on the enthusiasm of students and clients, I'm offering the first annual **Benchmarking Day for Improving Certification**.

Please let me know if you would like to attend a **FREE** one-day meeting on March 28, 2012 in Longboat Key, Florida. The meeting would run from 9am to 4pm at the Hilton Longboat Key Beachfront Resort.

For more information and to secure your reservation please contact me at:
wildandassociates.com/improving-certification/

Improving the Quality of Your Certification Program

A Learning and Planning Experience

Focus attention on your certification in a better learning and planning environment – by the sea!

Thank you all for your interest in *Improving the Quality of Your Certification Program: A Learning and Planning Experience*. Only one workshop is scheduled for this spring – March 26 & 27, 2012 in Longboat Key, Florida – and I hope you will join me for an exciting learning and planning experience!

Early bird registration price is \$1,500. After February 15th, the price is \$1,900.

Just as your certification program covers a body of knowledge, a body of knowledge exists on how to create and improve products and services. *“Improving the Quality of Your Certification Program”* is a learning and planning retreat with three months of follow-up resulting in a Quality Plan – your plan will apply quality concepts to your program.

In this program you will:

- Prepare for the retreat through pre-reading, providing some background information concerning your organization and your needs, and participating in a pre-workshop interview.
- Expand your knowledge during the retreat and plan your follow-up actions to expand your knowledge and inform your Quality Plan.
- Collect information to inform your Quality Plan during the two months following the workshop.
- Meet individually at least once a month with Dr. Wild by telephone to discuss progress and next steps in developing your Plan.
- Meet once a month by telephone with other participants from your retreat and Dr. Wild to discuss issues, solutions, and tools.
- Finalize your Quality Plan during the last month, based on information you have learned.

Upcoming Retreat Dates:

**March 26 & 27, 2012
Longboat Key, FL**

Please feel free to contact me at 732-774-5188 or cheryl@wildandassociates.com to discuss participating in the workshop.

