

10 mistakes to avoid for successful internal audits



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Ideally, internal audits should be more than a quick quality check. If you take them seriously, they will serve as a powerful tool for continuous improvement. Take advantage of the following tips to successfully implement your next internal audit.

1. Not setting a clear objective

The clearer the objective, the more valuable an internal audit becomes. If you are clear about what you want to achieve, creating a solid plan becomes much easier.

Ask yourself the following questions:

What am I going to do?

Why am I conducting an internal audit?

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And am I trying to improve processes, mitigate risks or cut costs?

2. Do not create support and do not establish authority

Good internal auditing is more than just lip service to quality control. You must create genuine support throughout your organisation, from top management to the factory floor. One way to achieve this is to appoint an auditor with sufficient influence or authority. It must be someone who is open, honest, diplomatic, culturally sensitive, persevering and resolute.

3. Do not prioritise

Internal audits involve sifting through a lot of information. To keep things under control, it is important to prioritise. Determine which process

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components or risks require your immediate attention based on the audit objectives.

4. Not asking the right questions

It is vital for the success of an internal audit to ask the right questions. Think carefully about these questions in the early planning stages.

Some examples are:

What are we currently doing?

How do these processes work? From beginning to end.

Where are the main bottlenecks, problem areas or risks?

What production targets have we set and how are we achieving them?

How are we monitoring and safeguarding the agreements we have made on our processes?

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What procedures and instructions have we provided to ensure that operational processes proceed according to plan?

According to our staff, what is working well and what is not?

5. Not identifying interested parties

Determine who is involved in the internal audit before you start. These stakeholders can then consider your pending internal audit. Who to involve depends largely on how many employees, departments and sites there are in your organisation.

Identifying stakeholders also allows you to determine the scope of your audit and how long it will take to talk to all those involved.

6. Not being grateful and constructive

Internal audits are more than just an inspection. And they must not turn into examinations. If you present yourself too rigidly or pedantically, then you will start to focus exclusively on what is wrong. This will eventually create a negative feeling about internal audits, forcing staff to withdraw and become less open to answering questions and accepting valuable feedback.

Being grateful and constructive is generally a much better strategy. This involves asking for positive things and encouraging staff to think of ways to change and further improve procedures or processes. Ultimately, this will result in improving and maintaining existing strengths.

7. Not adopting the right tone

"It's not what you say, but how you say it". This also applies to conducting internal audits.

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Formulate any criticism or suggestions for improvement constructively and think carefully about what you say. It is with good reason that standards organisations state that it is the auditor's job to 'make a professional judgement and not focus too rigidly on the specific requirements of each chapter of the standard to be assessed'.

8. Not making suggestions for improvement in the context

It is important to make suggestions for improvement based on clear evidence and demonstrable results and in such a way that staff recognise and identify with the context. This will greatly improve your chances of success.

9. Do not divide internal audits into topics

Internal audits often have a wide scope. The common tendency is to try to cover as many bases as possible,

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but this can sometimes become a trap. If you make your internal audits too broad, they will lack any substance or depth.

One way to avoid this trap is to assign a topic to your audit. Dividing your audit into different topics allows you to approach different issues from different angles and go much deeper. In addition, you will have more opportunities to probe deeper, as will your staff.

10. Not using the right tools

When you use the right tools to conduct your internal audits, you will notice how smooth the process can be.