

Antonio J. Otero
Director of Manufacturing Engineering and Quality
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By Michael F. Kastre

Being the best doesn't just happen. It requires consistently going all the way. "I have always put everything I had into the job," says Otero. "I never gave half a loaf, even in school."

This approach has paid off. For over 25 years, he has successfully climbed the auto giant's corporate ladder. Otero is currently a key member of the Buick City Assembly Center management team, where he is credited with helping the plant achieve worldwide recognition as a leader in quality.

As the United States fights to stay atop the increasingly competitive world technology ladder, the Cuban-born native represents the future. His role in an 11-member design team led to the transformation of manufacturing plants more than a half-century old into a modern assembly center on par with any in the world.

His engineering expertise and knowledge of production environments have enabled him to radically alter manufacturing concepts by applying new cost-efficient computer controls, robotics, just-in-time material management systems, and new employee relations to promote teamwork.

His group is organized to evaluate customer satisfaction and respond to customer requirements. This provides the focus for production, material management and engineering operations. His organization supports more than 5,000 workers, who are committed to resolving engineering issues.

According to Otero, "Our customer initiatives include a focus on their problems, quick response to engineering issues, warranty feedback, and responsiveness to marketing division concerns.

By crossing functional boundaries and assuming direct responsibility for eliminating quality problems, Buick City is doing what would have seemed unthinkable five years ago. The results have set new standards for American made automobiles. An initial independent quality survey ranked the Buick LeSabre, produced at Buick City, as the most trouble-free car built in the United States for 1989 and 1990 model years. Repairs alone dropped a staggering 6 percent in the 1990 model, compared to 1986 figures.

Otero has been instrumental in this process. Long before it was an accepted way to operate, he was promoting the concept of production being responsible for controlling quality. "No matter what the product, producing quality is one of our biggest technological challenges if we are to compete successfully," he says. "But quality is built in -- it comes from solid engineering."