

## **Your ISO 9001 Registration Audit: My “Top 5 Tips” for the big day**

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I can't discuss the entire technical content of an ISO registration audit in the space provided, but I can give a few pointers regarding issues I know to be significant to the audit's success. While this particular piece is geared towards an organization that is undergoing an ISO registration audit, bear in mind that these same points can apply to any type of assessment (customer, third-party, regulatory, etc.) of your organization.

As I think about it, I can actually list more than 5 points, but as this since the scope of this article is the “Top 5 Tips”, we'll start with those. Any issues I don't address in this article I promise to discuss at a later time. My Top 5 Tips are listed below, in no particular order (each item is significant):

1. *Stay Current* – In too many organizations, there's a natural reaction to “get busy” and play catch-up with the quality program immediately prior to the audit. Most auditors are aware that this occurs, and this fact is usually very noticeable within the program records. A good program will be current at all times, to a point where even an unannounced audit could be managed with a minimum of issues. Don't wait until the last minute to prepare.
2. *Presentation is everything* – When the audit day arrives, your files should be neat and orderly. In this case, this should include typed documents as opposed to handwritten documents, to the maximum extent possible (this even includes tabs on folders) - *anything that could be typed should.* Continuing with this line of thought, once this information is prepared, it should be assembled in a presentable format. I always provide, without exception, a reference binder or binders to the auditor at the start of the audit. Provide the auditor with well organized material and data before they get a chance to ask.
3. *Accommodate the Audit* - This can be an issue, particularly if your company has experienced a growth spurt in the recent past. I've can think of at least a half-dozen cases I've seen personally, where an auditor has been forced to work out in the lobby of the organization he was auditing. Even worse, I think I've actually lost count of the number of times that I've seen an auditor forced to work off a corner of someone's already occupied desk. Both of these scenarios are unacceptable - remember that an uncomfortable auditor can become an unhappy auditor, and this unhappiness may find its way into your final audit report. Also provide beverages and, as appropriate, snacks; order-in lunch if time is a constraint. Make the auditor as comfortable as possible.
4. *Show Management Commitment* - Everyone realizes that, in most organizations, the president or CEO doesn't participate in the day-to-day activities related to maintaining the quality program. This is acceptable, as it's generally acknowledged that they do have a business to run. Top management of the company does ultimately own this program however, and if management doesn't show interest in the registration audit process, a lack of management commitment could be perceived. I recommend the participation of at least one senior company manager or the opening meeting for the audit, and also for the review of audit results during the audit closing meeting. Management needs to participate to show their commitment to the program.

5. *Don't Argue with the Auditor* - As part of this audit, the auditor is required to give their professional opinion on the effectiveness of your quality program. I definitely encourage discussion with an auditor, but there comes a point where discussion becomes a heated debate, or worse, a full-blown argument. If you and the auditor can't reach agreement on an issue, you can't reach agreement on an issue; state clearly, once and one time only, that you disagree with the finding, and then move on. You will have an opportunity to dispute the issue once the final report is issued, and you should do so by providing objective evidence, references, position papers, etc. Let the auditor document his finding(s), and save your response until the final report is issued.

As for my "Top 5 Tips", this pretty much covers it. Regardless of the else, I always pay attention to each of these areas, and time and time again, they've helped to ensure a successful audit. If you're looking to get ISO certified in the future, I encourage you to consider these areas as well and I wish you the best of luck.

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