



TOPIC: TIME MANAGEMENT

TITLE: SUSTAINING SUCCESSFUL BEHAVIOR

"It is crucial for our future that we find ways to lead better. Because in the final analysis, it's not the general who wins, but the army. And the more that you can help people be self-sufficient, proud of themselves, and truly skillful, the more the organization and society are going to accomplish." - Reuben Mark

Welcome to the second newsletter of a three-part series on providing an environment that helps employees sustain successful behavior. My focus in this series is to help eliminate the peaks and valleys of performance and sustain it at a steadily increasing level.

Behavior change depends upon a combination of three things: clarity of expectations, competency to do the skill and motivation to get it done. When these are combined you build momentum, sustain performance and create lasting success.

In my last issue I talked about establishing clear expectations. Now I want to focus on identifying the level of competency to do the skill and helping employees take the necessary steps to improve. This requires some detective work - asking the right questions to assess skills fairly and then helping your employees see where they have opportunity for improvement.

Competency can be assessed in three primary categories: time, resources, and skills to do the job. Full competency is the combination of all three. The key is to identify where the greatest opportunity lies. Let's look at each of these more closely.

Time

There is never enough time to manage all the priorities we have. The challenge becomes making the time for the "blue chips" or the key critical actions. As a leader, manager and coach, your job is to help others sift through multiple priorities and teach skills at the same time. The first item to assess is your employee's plan for the day. If your expectations are clear, their supporting actions should be on the plan as priorities. Next, are you following-up with them periodically throughout the day, to see how they are doing, and where they need help. Can any behaviors or tasks be eliminated or delegated? Can the task be broken down into smaller tasks so it is not so overwhelming or time-consuming in a day? Your role is not to answer these questions for them, but ask them the questions and help them find their own answers.

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ACTION: What will you do to inspect the time management of your key employees?

How will you assess if they are working on their number one priority each day?

When will you follow-up with them throughout the day/week to see how they are doing?

Resources

Appropriate resources are also critical to competency. This is a combination of adequate money, systems, processes, etc. Money is similar to time -there is never enough. Systems and processes help ensure consistency and continuity. There always seems to be opportunity to have more tools, better systems, etc. However, there is also a limit to what we can realistically invest from a financial, time and resource standpoint. Sometimes throwing more people, more time, more money doesn't necessarily help - similar to the law of diminishing returns.

There are two critical areas to assess. Do they have the necessary tools and can I realistically expect them to work within the resource pool they currently have? If so, how can I help them work within the current resources? If not, what can I realistically give them to improve and when.

One successful approach is to help your employees do things differently. It is often easier to identify the constraints rather than solutions. Once you've acknowledged the constraints, you can help your employees brainstorm solutions on a "what if" basis. Trying new approaches will help employees work within their current constraints and use their resources wisely.

ACTION: What are the key resource constraints for my key staff?

What will you do to help them identify other alternatives or options?

How will you get their commitment to try at least one new approach?

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Knowledge and Skill

Developing and improving skills is the last key to improving competency. One solution is to "train to teach and coach to develop. Applying formal training to improve a skill can be effective, but it is often only a band-aid solution. Employees leave training educated on a skill and with good intentions to implement the new learning. When they come back to the office, however, they may not change their old habits. If you truly want the skill to endure, combine the training with consistent follow-up and coaching. Set a goal with employees before they go to training, and follow-up immediately after. What did they learn and what will they do differently? What will they stop doing or change about their old habits? How will they ensure they get it done?

For employees that do not attend formal training, follow-up and coaching provide skill improvement on a day-to-day basis. It helps define what your employee can do differently today, or even this week to improve their skill. Peers and employees provide valuable insight into doing things differently. We often find ourselves doing the same things, even if they've stopped working simply because we haven't been challenge to do it any differently.

ACTION: What will you do to challenge your key employees to do things differently?

What will you do to manage your training efforts?

How will you follow-up to see what's working and what's not?

My challenge for you this week is to assess the capability of your key staff or partners. What can you do to help them uncover new opportunities? Tune in to the next newsletter where I'll discuss the last component of sustainable behavior - motivation.