

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **MONITORING PERFORMANCE**

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*“How’d you like to work in a job where every time you made a mistake, a red light went off and 20,000 people started screaming at you?”*

—Jacques Plante, former NHL goalie

Once you’ve set the performance expectations your next step will be to monitor or track the performance. For some of you, this will be no problem, and you could even skip this chapter because you or your agency already have excellent systems in place for monitoring employee performance.

Monitoring employee performance is a primary management function. It is important not just because of performance standards, but because supervisors at all levels must know how well their organization and its people are accomplishing their mission. To manage organizational and individual performance, you need to have hard data, current information, and unbiased facts. You have to know whether things are going as planned, and if they are not, you need to know when to correct, what to correct, and who to correct.

Monitoring is not just about trying to find problems. Just as we want to find people doing things wrong, we also want to know who is doing the right thing and let them know so that we can help them continue. It is unfortunately all too common to see an outstanding employee drop into mediocrity along with everybody else because nobody recognized the great job he or she was doing.

### ***Principles of Monitoring***

Before we look at the types of tracking systems you might want to use, let's

first discuss some basic principles of monitoring performance.

## **Economy**

Do not spend more time and money monitoring performance than it is worth. You could, of course, monitor everything an employee does. You'd need essentially two people for every job—one to do the work and another to watch over the worker. We'll talk below about using time charges to different work projects as a way of monitoring performance. Although it is an excellent method of determining efficiency, the disadvantage of all those systems is that you now need to spend considerable extra employee hours having others enter the data in an automated system and then retrieve it in a usable format.

## **Timeliness**

Any monitoring system that does not provide timely information is of little value because you must be able to make immediate corrections. We will discuss relying upon inspections by third parties as a way of measuring the performance of subordinates and organizations later. Although it is certainly economical, as somebody else is doing your work for you and it costs you no extra money or work hours, be careful of those inspections that are only done once or twice a year. They are of no value if all of the information is so stale that you cannot act on it. It does you little good to find out that, six months ago, your employees were making serious mistakes that have continued to this day.

## **Objectivity**

The information should be pure and unbiased. Try to eliminate personality, emotions, and subjectivity. Client feedback is a good source of information. Be wary of relying too heavily on client feedback because it is filtered through many individual prejudices. People often are reluctant to give negative feedback about an employee's performance for fear of getting the person in trouble—especially a likeable employee. On the other hand, many take offense when the employee is doing the job correctly and inflate something trivial to try to hurt the employee.

## ***Side-Effects of Controls***

You must be careful when you establish monitoring devices and tracking systems. Not only should they meet the four criteria we just discussed, you must also be alert to some traps that are not always so obvious. Controls have side-effects, and you should think about these four consequences.

## **What You Count is What Counts**

Employees watch what you monitor. They pay closer attention to what you monitor and less attention to what you do not. Regardless of what you put into your performance plans, what employees pay attention to is what you keep track of. If you set up a monitoring system that asks clients how they felt about employees, the employees will quickly become slavishly devoted to clients. If you set up a monitoring system to keep track of how much time employees spend on different projects, you'll see employees start caring about where their time is going.

People pay more attention to what you monitor than to what you have in your performance standards if the two are different. Take the example regarding keeping track of client satisfaction: if you put something about client satisfaction into your performance standards, yet you do not set up any type of monitoring system to get feedback, your employees will become indifferent to the desires of the client. It's not what you say that counts, but what you count that counts.

This is not necessarily bad, but you must realize how powerful this impulse is and you must make sure that you are keeping track of the right things. You must make sure that the behaviors you are encouraging by keeping track of something are what is important to the mission. Consider the example regarding setting up a monitoring system to determine how clients feel about the employees. Just by keeping track of this, even if you never write any performance standards that "measure" how clients feel about your employees, their behavior will change. You will find them becoming devoted to keeping their clients happy.

Your first impression is probably that it's a great idea and will foster a badly needed sense of customer service. This may be at the expense of some

other goal. You may find that they become so concerned with keeping the client happy that they may break any rule, even an important one, just to keep somebody from complaining.

Employees will focus on what you monitor and pay less attention to what you do not. If you count speed, they will pay less attention to quality. If you count quality, you may get a tremendous product but at an unjustifiably high cost in time. If you count customer complaints, you will get employees who will pay any price, even giving people seriously erroneous guidance and assistance, just to keep them happy.

This poses a serious dilemma for which there is no easy answer. You cannot measure everything because if you try that, people will pay attention to nothing. If you hedge your bets by trying to set counterbalancing standards, you will be sending employees mixed signals.

Give serious thought to what you intend to monitor and later measure and make sure that you really mean it. Do not become frightened by the fear of failure. There is nothing to be embarrassed about if you have to change what you are measuring or tracking because it is not having the desired effect. You can change your performance standards any time during the rating period if they are not doing what you want. It is better to try something out and then have to change it than to sit around agonizing, wringing your hands, doing nothing out of fear.

## **The Quality Control Paradox**

If you spend too much time double- and triple-checking people's work, it may adversely affect the quality of work. There is a strange paradox about quality control efforts that include checking and rechecking tangible work products. They often create an unintentional tendency in people to worry less about the original quality of the work. Even the most thoughtful and diligent mechanic who knows that his or her work will be reviewed by several quality control people cannot help but be a bit less careful. It is always in the back of your mind that if you make a mistake, the inspectors will pick it up. When you know that what you do may not be double-checked, you tend to be much more careful to make sure that it is right the first time.

The problem this paradox poses is that you must find the right balance.