

Managing for outcomes

Do you find your action list growing considerably longer each week, with the big ticket items continually falling to the end?

Do you feel that some days you have just not achieved anything?

Answering yes to either of these questions could mean that you are more comfortable on focusing on the reactive stuff, the here and now, rather than the bigger picture stuff – or the final outcome.

We all know the answer to the question 'how do you eat an elephant?' Answer - 'one chunk at a time'. We further understand the significance of that analogy in breaking tasks down into bite sized chunks. However, how many of us take the time to actually visualise the elephant (the final outcome) and translate that vision into how it will look for key stakeholders once all the work is completed?



Quite often I am faced with companies whose staff appear to be really busy, running backwards and forwards doing...well 'work'. When I question individuals about how their piece of work will contribute to the final outcome, it is rare that I can find anyone who can articulate the overall outcome, much less what impact it will have on their customer.

On a recent visit to a company based in Wales, I was thrilled with my reception. From the car park attendant, to the duty receptionist, to the lady who offered me coffee and then onwards to the HR Director who I had the meeting with; my experience was one of exceptional customer service.

I questioned the director on this amazing reception and asked him about his recruitment methods. He said that it was nothing to do with recruitment methods, but rather the way his company approached the induction process. He explained that each new hire to the company has to undergo a week long induction programme before they are released into their day job. The key theme of the induction is 'exceptional customer service and what that really means'.

No PowerPoint slides for these new staff on organisational structures and where the toilets are located. Instead, these staff spent an intensive week brain storming what 'truly' makes exceptional customer service, with their new company seeking their ideas and feedback on what it means.

Starting with the end in mind has really focused the staff at this organisation to think about the outcomes they are trying to achieve - rather than the minutiae of day to day tasks.

I probed a little deeper with the HR Director and asked how he monitored and rewarded such behaviours. "Ah" he said "you want to know if we have competency frameworks that support these behaviours?" He went on to tell me that no such frameworks exist, but rather managers are trained in continual reinforcement of the outcomes that everyone is looking for.

He explained that at every opportunity staff are asked by their manager "what impact **did** that have on the customer?" or even more tellingly "what impact **will** that have on the customer?" It gets staff thinking about the end result rather than the task. If what they are working on does not in some way contribute to the final outcome required then they are encouraged to put that piece of work aside and look for something that will really have an impact.

I wanted to know what outcomes this laissez faire approach was having on their business. Internally, I was informed that the organisation had the highest possible retention rates, the lowest possible absenteeism figures and the achievement of business outcomes that a lot of other companies could only dream about.

Setting clear and measurable objectives for staff is still a must for managers but maybe the R in SMART must take on a significant starring role. How are the tasks that are being set for staff **relevant** to the final outcome? If we can get staff focusing on the outcome rather than a series of tasks, their ability to decide on what is important and what can be de-prioritised must increase exponentially.

We must be asking our managers almost daily "what is the outcome you are trying to achieve?" If what they articulate is merely a list of tasks their team are working on, then we must question and probe still further until we really understand what the elephant looks like. The more managers are encouraged to think about the end result first and articulate that end result to their staff, the better will be the staffs' abilities to judge what the important tasks are and what tasks can be moved down the to-do list.

Deborah Godbold (FCIPD)
Peppermint Learning Ltd

If you would like more information on managing for outcomes, then you can contact us on **0870 850 8775** or by e-mail at **info@peppermintlearning.co.uk**

www.peppermintlearning.co.uk

1. Start with the end in mind – visualise what you are trying to achieve.
2. Create that vision for staff through explaining what good will look like for the key stakeholders?
3. Keep reinforcing the final outcome required by asking "what impact will what you are currently doing have on the customer?"
4. Continually ask "WHY are we doing this" for every task undertaken? If it is not key to the final outcome, then stop doing it.