

What Results are You Measuring?

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I've written several articles over the past year suggesting that you think in advance of the desired outcome you want to generate. For example, when I meet with a client, I ask, "What is your desired outcome from today's coaching call?"

Or, to stay focused when working on discretionary items, I'll ask myself, "What's my desired outcome in the next ten minutes?"

The same concept applies in organizations. If I interviewed all of the contributors to your organization's success, could they tell me the top four or five results that you measure, what the trend is on each, and why each is important?

When I conduct an organizational assessment, I typically ask: "In what areas of your company are results really good? In what areas are results really poor?" Notice that the questions presume the individual knows what "results" are, but I typically find many individuals stumbling over their answers.

"We must be doing a pretty good job--we're all still working!" "We talk about needing better systems for recruiting." "Most people think this is a pretty good place to work."

Make your own assessment. Are your employees aware of your average daily sales or production? Would they have some idea of how you measure customer satisfaction and if it is improving? Do they know how you calculate productivity and how they can contribute to improving it?

If your answers to those questions are in doubt, don't blame your employees. You can't expect them to know information that's not been shared. Your role as a leader is to describe accurately what currently exists and to repeatedly share a future vision of "what could be" that is inspiring and engaging.

Can you honestly say you've done your part? Is there some easy place that an employee can go and become aware of the organization's results? I suggest you designate a high-profile area, easily accessible to your employees, for displaying your results in the following manner.

Graph your results. Display at least three and preferably four or five of your key results areas for the past three or more years. Consider including a projection forward for a couple of years, especially if you've worked with your employees in identifying explicit improvement initiatives.

Describe the importance. Provide a brief explanation as to why each particular measure is a valuable indicator of the organization's success. If possible, make the descriptions relevant to the welfare of employees. Specifically, answer the question that few openly ask but all are thinking: "What's in it for me?" (If the answer is nothing more than "continuing employment," say so! Most people are mature enough to recognize that you've got competitors, and no success is guaranteed to last forever!)

Identify relevant behaviors. Just because an individual knows what's being measured and why it's important doesn't guarantee that he or she knows what to do to make those results better. Beneath the graph and the "importance" description, list a series of "bullet points" identifying desirable behaviors. Most people, when they know what's being measured, why it's important, and what behaviors will move the chart, gladly apply their energies in the right direction.

If you've not already shared this kind of information with your organization, get them involved. Have a front-end conversation about what you're doing. Encourage them to be creative with you in considering what the measures should be and what the wording should be in the descriptions.

They'll likely identify the results you'd prefer to graph anyway. Maybe they'll identify something that you had never considered tracking. The more they can "own" these displays, the more committed they'll be to making the graphs look good!

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