

Committing to Less and Accomplishing More

By David Rodgers

In many organizations, I see people being burned-out and defeated by the constant pressure to “do more with less.” If this feeling is pervasive in your department, it can pull you down with the others. When you see this happening, you need to change the game. You need to meet the challenge with confidence and clarity. I call it "Accomplishing More by Committing to Less."

Groups become paralyzed when they can't see how their day-to-day efforts contribute to the big picture. Clarifying priorities will help; however, priority lists don't paint a big picture. They actually keep people focused on minutia. Vision and mission statements don't keep people focused on the big picture because they do not help people focus their day-to-day work. Both of these are helpful but don't solve the issue. We need a focus that will assist each individual in maintaining the larger context in their day-to-day work.

There are three steps to painting an ongoing context and regenerating your team or organization:

Step 1: Commit to the Non-Negotiables.

Be courageous! Commit to only a few non-negotiable priorities. This means leaving others out. People say, "If it is not prioritized and tracked, it won't get done." It's not true. By committing to a few "non-negotiables," projects are handled in the right order and context by the people in your group. There isn't a need to track everything. Recently I watched the Information Systems (IS) Group at Queen's Medical Center, in Honolulu, utilize this principle. They agreed to improve and track two major objectives: Reduce Downtime and Improve Customer Interaction. This set a context for every change, integration, decision and project done at every level of the organization and started to produce immediate results that could be seen.

Step 2: Translate, Track, Reinforce.

Individuals won't initially see how this new focus changes or applies to what they are doing. Therefore, you set specific improvement or accomplishment goals together. These are no longer lofty statements but specific and tangible accomplishments. The IS group didn't just say the words “downtime” and “customer interaction.” They developed very specific expectations and milestones and they tracked them as leaders. Once the ball is rolling, the leader needs to demonstrate commitment: Are you asking for progress reports on these key items? Do you step in when people are off-track or confused? Are you linking new projects with these few focuses when you present? Are you explaining why we are not focusing on certain issues? Have you rallied the support of your peers that utilize and impact your group? Are you updating people inside and outside the department on the overall progress? Without consistent communication of the progress and these re-enforcing actions, people tend to fragment and lose hope.

Step 3: Acknowledge Direct and Indirect Results.

Declare all successes that are related to the project. We see people all the time

acknowledging success but only the success directly linked to that project. When you are dealing with a Key Focus or "Non-Negotiable" project, that project itself causes more completion and success than you can imagine when you start out.

This approach is much like tending a fire. In the early stages it is easy for the flame to smolder and die. But once the flame is going, it devours what you give it as more fuel rather than collapsing under the new weight. People once again become excited about what they are doing and know they are making a difference, building individual success and pride - not only in their own work, but in their co-workers', department and company.