

PRST STD  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
AMES, IA  
Permit No. 22

POSTAL CUSTOMER  
LOCAL

28 | AMES BUSINESS MONTHLY | APRIL 2010

## MID-IOWA BUSINESS

# Keeping score on the job

Last month, I discussed techniques employees can use to provide personalized service to customers, including:

- Using names.
- Exhibiting empathy.
- Making effective use of space.
- Making the experience special.

I stressed the need for employees to see their managers modeling these same desired behaviors, not only to customers, but also to employees. Indeed, in his latest book, “Three Signs of a Miserable Job: A Fable for Managers (And Their Employees),” Patrick Lencioni identifies anonymity as a highly undesirable job trait. In other words, employees want to be recognized as a unique person, not just another cog in the machine.

This month, I want to focus on another of Lencioni’s characteristics for a lousy job, referred to as “immeasurement” or the absence of pertinent measurements for one to assess their own performance.

We are a society comfortable with measurement. Listen in on the conversations in any break room and you’ll hear all sorts of statistics being shared:

• “I shot a 43 on the back nine last night.”

• “We averaged 57 miles per hour on the way out to Denver.”



**RICK  
BRIMEYER**

• “That walleye on the left weighed just less than seven pounds.”

• “My Civic is getting 36 miles per gallon.”

• “My grandson, Michael, scored a 30 on his

ACT test.”

After lunch is over, the majority of these same employees return to jobs devoid of measurement, save for perhaps a cursory count of how many times they completed their primary work activity. The result is that employees, not to mention their supervisors, have little objective data with which to assess one’s current level of performance or opportunities for improvement.

Consider that the average high school basketball player has considerably more tangible data on their performance than the average worker. Now consider the consequences of under-performance for each; while the athlete may lose some playing time, the employee stands to lose a livelihood.

So how does one go about developing an environment of healthy measurement?

The first step is to begin regularly sharing the overall performance or score of the organization. This should be a balanced set of metrics covering all of the critical aspects of your organization, including safety, quality, delivery and some type of financial measurement (profit, cost or productivity). While it’s certainly prudent to use discretion in sharing financial information within a private business, a metric that protects the owner’s interests, yet is meaningful to employees, can be developed with a little thought.

Once the organization’s overall measurements have been established, work teams and even individuals can be guided to identify local measurements that support the global metrics. For example, if the organization is tracking customer complaints or defects, order entry personnel should monitor their error rate for orders containing bad or missing information that result in errant shipments.

Consideration should be given to design metrics so employees can easily garner the necessary data in as close to real time as possible. With a bit of creativity, a simple, clear and visual scoreboard can be established within the work area. Goals should be included on the scoreboard and celebrated when they are attained.

One final word of caution: In most cases, performance is a stronger reflection of the processes used to perform work rather than of the workers themselves. For example, try as I may this past winter, I just couldn’t match my neighbor’s ability to clear a driveway. That’s because his process involved a two-stage, 5-horsepower blower while my process used a single-stage, 3-horsepower wimp (and a shovel when it could no longer clear the snow bank).

Managers and employees must therefore be trained to look for process improvements rather than someone to assign blame to when the measurements point in the wrong direction. When employees begin constantly thinking of ways to improve the processes they use to perform work, both they and their organization benefit. Knowing the score is the first step towards improving it.

**Rick Brimeyer** is the president of Brimeyer LLC, an independent management consulting firm located in Ames that guides organizations to higher performance by focusing on process improvement and leadership development.

Further information is available at [www.brimeyerllc.com](http://www.brimeyerllc.com) or by calling (515) 450-8855.