

# Whether check # 3

In previous columns I've detailed ways to involve the workforce in activities that contribute directly to the development of organization capacity. The first opportunity for engagement involved developing long-term direction by participating in such activities as creating shared vision. The second column provided options for involvement in strategy development by engaging in activities that identified profitable advantages. Now I'll examine those aspects of work that lead to more tangible, measurable and immediate results: program design, goals, objectives, priorities and value-added tasks.

**Program design** focuses on the sequence and actions taken that lead to measurable results. There will be several steps in a program that often extend across departments. An example of a program design might be "order fulfillment" that runs the gamut from the customer identifying a product to buy, all the way to product delivery. This might be a simple or a highly complex set of transactions. Designing and maintaining the most effective flow of this process will involve those who must take action at every step along the way. Collecting data from the full range of sources, including the customer, results in high commitment.

**Goals** are established so that members of the workforce can measure collective results. A goal incorporates both a qualitative and quantitative measure of a group of co-workers' success. When a goal is achieved, it is cause for collective celebration. Selling the millionth product is something that everyone in the sales department can revel in, even if some individual quotas were not met. Achieving a goal requires a great deal of collaborative effort.

**Objectives** support the overarching goals. Workers are often held accountable for achieving objectives. Equally as often, both success and failure will have consequences. When a worker is assigned an objective, it is best if the objective is the culmination of realistic negotiation that includes the worker. The most important aspect of setting objectives is the caliber of negotiation dialogue. Objectives often result in some form of job description and training.

**Priorities** establish a sequence when everything can't be done at once. When everything becomes urgent, there are no priorities. Scheduling work ought to include both the urgent and the important. Urgent work is scheduled because of immediate need. A waiting customer is more urgent than

work that will be picked up next week. Important work usually has more to do with the development of potential than with the immediate need. Architectural designs that permit profitable growth over the

next few years may not satisfy an immediate need. However, if the right people cannot devote the time needed for these priorities the urgency of expansion will likely drive less effective decisions at a later date.

**Value-added tasks** are outward and visible – the culmination of "whether checks" to help determine if the right things are being done right. Some tasks, especially the urgent ones, are observed and measurable. Other tasks are in the important category. Finding ways to improve organizational performance is important but also discretionary. One of our rising star associates created a new way to use an aspect of her spreadsheet software that gave managers information they didn't know they could get that would improve decisions. The new option was easily installed. This inventive requirement was not on her job description. She just saw the need and satisfied it. Wouldn't every employer like to have that kind of employee?

In all likelihood you already do have innovative employees, but may not be fully cultivating their potential by emphasizing a balance between the urgent and the important. Innovation takes time and encouragement. Wouldn't every employee like to have that kind of employer?

We are now in the final stages of the 2007 Best Places to Work in Hampton Roads contest. If you have not entered the contest yet, consider it. Hampton Roads needs the inspiration of an outstanding organization as much as your organization needs to be inspired by outstanding employees. Entering this contest can serve both outcomes.

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