



Results Orientated Management: Does it Work?

If you are the kind of manager who is focussed on results, who scrutinises results in detail to understand if the outcome is acceptable, and if not why not, then you are probably not as effective as you could be. Chris Baxter tells us why and what we can do about it...

By the time a result has happened there's little or nothing you can do to improve it. The things that caused the result have already happened, they're in the past. And yet results-orientated managers focus on the past even though they can't change it. Managers who adopt this results-orientated style often spend much of their time feeling pretty frustrated and even angry that the results they're getting fall short of what they want. Typically they have high standards and demand great results, and yet invest little time or imagination in figuring out how to get what they wanted in the first place. Instead too much of their time is spent performing post-mortems on previous activities that went wrong, apportioning blame, and developing ever more bureaucratic controls to prevent the same mistakes happening in the future.

However, preventing things from going wrong is not necessarily going to cause them to go right, because a preoccupation with error does not manufacture success. At best the elimination of mistakes produces an outcome that is unremarkable, neither a success nor a failure. For instance: we made a profit, but not a great profit; we didn't make any mistakes, but neither were we particularly innovative; the customer wasn't disappointed, but neither are they delighted; and we didn't learn anything that will help us do better the next time. In between right and wrong is an indistinct and unremarkable middle-ground. If you eliminate mistakes you don't get excellent, you get dull.

For instance, can you recall visiting a restaurant where the food and service wasn't bad but neither was it great? There was nothing obviously wrong but neither was there anything distinctive or remarkable. Perhaps the whole experience was rather underwhelming and left you with no compelling reasons to visit again or recommend the restaurant to your friends. You may also recall going to the cinema and coming away feeling disappointed. There was nothing obvious wrong with the film but it was just a bit dull. This is the middle ground between bad and good. Whilst it isn't irritating and maddening, it is frustrating and very unlikely to result in increased sales or customer loyalty.

A far more effective way of developing successful results is to examine your successes and the successes of other organisations. Identify the factors that led to those successes, proactively ensure that those factors are present in your business, and occur again and again. In ensuring that these success factors are present you will simultaneously eliminate many of the causes of failure, for when activities are performed in a way that causes success they cannot at the same time be performed in a way that causes failure. You will gain the most by explaining what doing it right looks like and encouraging people to work this way so that they can focus their efforts on producing great results. So build awareness of what great is made of, and reinforce this regularly.