

Actions = Results

One of the Newtonian laws of physics states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. There is a parallel, immutable law of human activity that states that a given set of inputs (behaviors) produces a particular output. To put it even more simply, Actions = Results. That's interesting you might say, but what does it have to do with effective management?

This simple equation provides an easy way to evaluate the effectiveness of your management style. Are you getting the results you want? If not, then the input, or actions, must be modified. Often, a manager's first response is to work on adjusting the behavior of her subordinates. This would appear to be a logical response since the unsatisfactory results are occurring in their area of direct responsibility. However, attempting to get them to change without modifying your own behavior is an exercise in futility.

When I suggest to managers that their behavior must also change, they often respond that the subordinate is the problem, not them. So why should they change what they're doing? They aren't doing anything wrong.

Who's right or wrong is not the issue, forget the blame game. The issue is how to get the desired results, and this is only accomplished by modifying the chain reaction of behaviors producing them. It's certainly true that the subordinate's results depend upon their own actions, but it's also true that the subordinate's actions are the result of their manager's actions. Therefore, it's unrealistic to expect subordinates to modify their behaviors if the manager doesn't change hers. Perhaps this will be clearer if we look at a real world example.

Your sales manager and his team aren't meeting their sales goals. His response is that everyone will try harder during the upcoming period, and he agrees that the next quarterly goal is still realistic. As in the past, you monitor monthly results, and frequently receive informal updates from the sales manager about what's happening out in the field. At quarter's end, sales results have again fallen short. The sales manager explains that the competition continues to low-ball prices and cut margins. You're sympathetic, and appreciate his genuine concern for his people and the company. He promises that the sales team will re-double their efforts, and they will deliver the next quarter's sales goal.

Unfortunately, working harder employing the same techniques and behaviors isn't good enough. It's not realistic to expect different results when the actions remain unchanged. In fact, one could be rightfully accused of insanity for expecting the immutable laws of human activity to change just because you'd like them to do so.

To achieve the projected results, the way you're managing the sales manager must change. Taking the lead in changing demonstrates a willingness to do what is necessary, and becomes a role model for the process of altering his actions. This cascading change in behaviors increases the probability that the entire sales team will improve their results. Consider the following approach.

First, analyze what's happening in the marketplace and agree upon a new strategy to overcome the inroads being made by your competitors. Wishful thinking, and hoping that things will get better, obviously hasn't proven to be an effective approach.

Secondly, provide closer supervision to your sales manager during this time of molding new habits. Schedule weekly meetings to monitor progress and probe to determine if he is really behaving and managing differently. It will soon become clear whether the changes that have already been made are sufficient to achieve the established sales goals. If not, determine together what else needs to happen to achieve the desired results. This approach reinforces his need to change, and demonstrates through your modified management style that you have changed.

Sales training may be needed to sharpen the team's skills in order to overcome the impact of your competitor's aggressive marketing and sales campaign. But learning about new techniques and approaches is not enough. Only applied knowledge is power. Therefore, only by employing these new ideas, and actually changing actions, will results improve.

It's oft been said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Someone's heart being in the right place is not enough. The bottom-line in business is consistently producing the results promised. To deliver this bottom-line, a person, department, or company must regularly monitor progress against a budget or some other written plan. If the results aren't where they need to be, then the plan and it's implementation must be improved.

As a manager, the rule to follow is a simple one. If you're not getting the results you want, the behaviors (actions) producing these result must change – both yours and theirs.

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