



How to Get Employees to Manage Themselves

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Employees don't leave companies. They leave managers.

70% of employees don't feel valued by their employers. 64% of Americans leave their jobs due to lack of recognition. This impacts the bottom line because customers feel the effects of employee success and either respond with loyalty, or get turned off by bad service or inferior products. There has to be a better way to improve employee and manager relationships in order to maximize business success. The answer is simple.

Manage the work, not the people.

So how do you get employees to manage themselves?

Employees who manage themselves must have equal parts autonomy and accountability. In other words, employees must have control of their time, a clear understanding of the results they're expected to achieve and a common culture of focusing on what matters. Managers are then freed to coach and mentor the right work against agreed-upon measurable goals, rather than playing hall monitor. In this ebook, we'll give you a clear picture of how to do this.

Autonomy and Motivation

Ultimately, if intrinsic motivation is absent then all else is a temporary fix at best. Motivation is not a program; it is a personal approach to inspiring individuals to do great work. The key to motivation is being clear and objective about what the work is, while refraining from prescribing how people need to do the work.

Autonomy and intrinsic motivation go hand in hand. One of our young Gen Y friends says it this way: “When managers try to intercede and direct too much, they limit our ability to exceed expectations. Some of the best places I’ve worked have been where my boss comes to me and says: ‘Here’s the big picture. This is what we need to accomplish. How do you want to get it done?’ That makes me feel great. When others are looking at me to deliver great results, what’s a better motivator than that? I’m not motivated by a list of rules and parameters and policies. It really turns me off to be restricted in that way.”

We must treat employees like adults.

What is the role your employees play? What are the objective, measurable expectations you set for them? According to social expectations theory, we know that people tend to adopt social norms and roles and to conform their behavior to meet expectations.

Step back and look at your employees' perceptions of their roles in your organization. Are they treated like adults or children? Here's an example of social expectations in the workplace:

Jim comes into work early because he knows you keep track of his time, pretends to be busy when you're watching, sneaks down the hall to gossip with co-workers, calls in sick (with extra coughing so you know he's not faking it!), and asks permission to leave early to see his daughter at her holiday program at school.

Really? Jim, a grown man, feels the need to act like a grade schooler — asking permission, sneaking around, looking busy, faking sick to get a day off. When you treat your employees like children, they will act like children.

These kinds of presenteeism policies might give your HR department a feeling of security, but what are they really doing to your employees' productivity levels and job satisfaction? A new study by a team of economists reports that even if they're working, it's the temptation of the forbidden that actually lowers employees productivity. Dictating when your employees must come and go, what internet sites they're allowed to visit, what clothes they can or cannot wear... all of these paternalistic structures of the traditional workplace are sending one clear message:

You aren't trustworthy.

Manage the Work, Not the People

The difference between managing the work and managing the people looks a lot like the distinction between a coach and a micro-manager.

If micro-managers are like babysitters, then the bosses we all hope to have are like great coaches. Coaches inspire and bring out the best in their team. Micro-managers slowly suck the life out of you. Everybody knows a micro-manager, but nobody claims to be one. Certainly, bosses view themselves differently than their employees see them. 1 in 3 managers say they use a coaching style, but only 1 in 5 employees agree (according to this Adecco study).

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What managing people looks like:

- What time did you get in?
- We need everyone in the office for an all staff meeting.
- Team A is allowed flexibility and Team B is not.
- We all need to be working harder like Sue — she has been staying ‘til 7pm every night!

What managing the work looks like:

- I need that report by 2pm on Thursday.
- We need to improve our sales figures by 15% by April 30.
- What are your ideas for meeting this goal?
- Let me know when you need my help.

Let’s take a look at how crucial this difference is when it comes to work culture and the bad habits that keep employees from managing themselves.

Change the Conversation

The old currency of work is Time + Physical Presence = Results. We want to change the conversation so that we have objective measures of results, not subjective. The new currency of work is Results. Period.

This is business, after all; it's not personal. Results are what we pay people for... not warming a chair and putting in time.

For employees to take ownership of their work and manage themselves, the foundation of work must change. Culture change isn't easy, but it's necessary. We have to get rid of the "Sludge."

"Sludge" is the Results-Only Work Environment term for any remark that reinforces the notion that work = butt-in-chair time and not results achieved. Sludge is often snide, frequently mean-spirited, and is usually meant to make us feel bad for failing to live up to the way we're "supposed" to be working. It is what we fall back on as managers when we manage people, not the work. Our employees use it on each other as well.

We're all familiar with Sludge. See if any of these remarks sound familiar:

"Nice of you to join us!"

“Guess who just strolled in?!”

“Her kids seem to get sick an awful lot...wish I had a kid as an excuse for a day off.”

“How many vacation days have you taken now?”

“Must be nice to ‘work’ from home.”

“Is he ever at his desk?”

“Well, I’ve been here since 9:00...”

Sludge is a powerful part of the 9-5 mentality because it reinforces an outdated concept of what “work” looks like. It implies that “real” work can only be done between 9am and 5pm, parked at your desk, and that anyone who operates outside of these prescribed conditions must somehow be slacking off or getting away with something.

It doesn’t take into account the fact that most work can now be done anytime, anywhere, or that people have lives and deserve to have control over how they spend their time. Or that truly grownup and responsible adults know how to manage their jobs and their lives in such a way that both areas get the attention they deserve.

Sludge also gives traditional 9-5ers the chance to make themselves look like dedicated little worker bees regardless of how well they're actually performing. Mary might be a rock star employee who achieves stellar measurable results, but if Maureen can point out that Mary has come in 15 minutes 'late' every day this week, well, now who looks like the diligent employee? Nevermind that Maureen spends half her workday playing Solitaire and looking up cute kitten pictures online...

Sludge is condescending, judgmental, and based entirely on an outdated notion of "work" that doesn't hold up anymore.

Employees don't need to take responsibility in a dysfunctional work culture that is not concerned with results and only results.

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Drop the Labels

What are labels? Teleworker, remote worker, office worker, virtual worker, telecommuter, part-timer, flex worker. Labeling employees according to where or how they work isn't useful and is, in fact, a great way to set up animosity among team members.

It can also get ridiculous. Take this example from American Express who labels their workers as Hub, Club, Roam, or Home.

As part of its BlueWork program, American Express conducts an employee survey, which helps assign employees to one of four categories: Hub, Club, Roam, and Home. “Hub” employees’ work requires a fixed desk, and their presence in the office every day. “Club” employees have flexible roles that involve in-person and virtual meetings; they have the opportunity to share time between the office and other locations. Those in the “Home” category are based from home offices—set up with assistance from the company—on three or more days per week. “Roam” employees are almost always on the road or at customer sites, and seldom work from an American Express office.

It perplexes us that people who are envisioning the future workplace still see it as managed flexibility (an oxymoron) vs. 100% autonomous and accountable for all.

Beyond Telework

Operating in a Results-Only Work Environment means that all employees are 100% accountable and autonomous. They will be where they need to be to get results, whether it's in the office, meeting in person with a client or customer, or collaborating over Skype while at the corner coffee shop.

“Telework” and all the variations of managed flexibility are just the same old office politics with a new location. Here's why we have to go beyond telework so that all employees can take ownership of their work, manage their own schedules, and live their lives to the fullest:

- Telework is not a new idea, no matter how many fun and catchy marketing spins you put on it (“My Work,” “iWork,” “My Mobile Workplace,” “Workflex,” etc).
- It's not flexible. If your telework days are Tuesday and Thursday and now that doesn't work for you anymore, you have to write a new proposal and get approval to change your days. And the answer will most likely be “no” (“You should be grateful you got to telework in the first place. It's a privilege, not a right”).
- Everyone is Sludging the teleworkers. “I wish I could sit at home all day eating bon bons like the teleworkers. Those of us in the office do all the work!”

- Telework has limited access—it's only for the special people. Haven't been at the company a year yet? Tough. Too low on the totem pole? Tough. Your boss decided your job isn't right for telework? Tough. You don't have the appropriately designed home office? Tough. I don't like you. TOUGH!
 - Nobody believes you're really working if you're TELEworking.
 - In order to telework, you need to ask PERMISSION. It's fun being back in elementary school, right?!
 - People who telework aren't seen as dedicated as those who spend 60+ hours each week in the office.
 - People STILL believe the best and only way to build great relationships is face to face. It's a sad fact those poor teleworkers don't put in enough face time; therefore, their relationships are sub-par.
 - Telework is a label we put on people who are not working where they should be. The office.
- Drop the labels and managed flexibility. Restore team cooperation and autonomy.

Provide the Tools

It seems like new collaboration and productivity apps are coming online daily. There's no definitive list of tools or secret formula for the perfect set of apps. That said, there are certainly some standard workhorses out there that have been time tested and proven worthy. Skype, Basecamp, Google Plus Hangouts, GoToMeeting, Dropbox, Google Drive—these are the granddaddies of online collaboration tools, and there are new ones springing up all the time.

Passive and interrupting tools: The above list is a combination of passive and interrupting communication tools. It's important to be able to interrupt co-workers when there's an emergency or we want to virtually pop our heads in the office door. But for those times when there isn't an emergency, these passive communication and productivity tools come in handy. We can email, drop a note in Basecamp, or leave a voicemail anytime.

The important thing to remember is that your employees should have the power to decide what tools they prefer to use. These technologies help us eliminate friction from our work. Team members are truly free to work when and where they want to, while always having the ability to stay in touch, collaborate, and get work done.

Another thing to remember: The office is simply another collaboration tool to use when team members agree it's the right tool to use at the time to achieve measurable results. The office should never be the default location that you force everyone to use all the time.

Measurable Results and Accountability

None of the above will matter if, and this is a big IF, you aren't clear about measurable results and don't hold employees accountable. "I'd like you to work on being a team player" is absolutely not a business goal. It's up to the interpretation of everyone around you and you'll never win that one.

What isn't measurable is subject to interpretation. This puts you as an employer or manager in a bad spot and tempts you to reward face-time and presenteeism.

Ask yourself: does everyone on your team or in your organization know the ultimate outcome you are trying to achieve? You probably won't find it in the vision or mission statement—which shouldn't come as a surprise.

Outcome-based goal setting gets everyone aligned first. This way, creating measurable results is effective and achievable. This framework is outcome-based thinking, and generates an environment where performance is managed on a continuous basis. That means all the time, not just at the yearly performance review meeting.

Conclusion

Remember college? If you didn't know the material, you got a bad grade. If you skipped every class and had no clue what classes you were even taking and got a bad grade, you were accountable. No results? No GRADE.

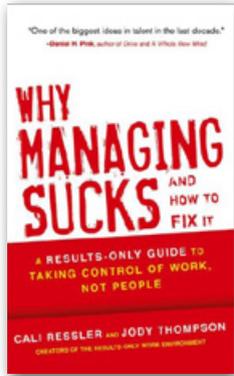
“ Operating in a Results-Only Work Environment means that all employees are 100% accountable and autonomous. They will be where they need to be to get results ...

You are getting paid to deliver something for the organization. At work, what it should come down to is this: “No results, no job.”

This leaves you as a manager in the role of mentor and coach. You are responsible for removing roadblocks for your team and crystallizing outcomes in the minds of your employees.

Manage the work, not the people. When you've created a culture that focuses on results, and only results, the people will step up and manage themselves. 📌

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS | Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson are the Founders of CultureRx and creators of the Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE). Cali & Jody are nationally recognized keynote speakers and have presented to numerous Fortune 500 companies and prominent trade associations. Cali & Jody created ROWE based on the belief that the traditional solution of flexible schedules is not the answer to managing life's many twists and turns. Bottom line? Work sucks. So they're on a mission to fix it. Today, Cali & Jody are leading a global movement to forever change the way we work and live. Learn more at www.gorowe.com.

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