

The Completion Principle

Joe Whitefield

Runnin' and Gunnin.' Most facilities managers I talk with are extremely busy—in some cases becoming overwhelmed—with the mounting activities and requirements of the job. Of course, there are many contributors to the fast, and sometimes frantic, pace we maintain. Normal work requirements (both routine and non-routine), staffing issues, and personnel issues are more than enough to keep a facilities manager busy. Add to the mix modern-day issues such as the economic recession, changing workplace demographics, increasing regulations, coupled with personal/family demands—all of this can quickly become unmanageable.

Whatever the causes, time is a commodity that seems to be less and less available. It can get a little depressing just thinking about it all, and that is precisely the point that needs to be addressed. There are personal and organizational consequences associated with having so much to do with so little time. Loss of productivity, burnout, sloppy work, impatience with others, stress, and deteriorating attitudes and morale are just a few.

ASKING TWO QUESTIONS

If these problems are plaguing your organization, there are two important questions to ask:

1. What can be done to reduce or eliminate the stressors?
2. What can be done to reduce the negative impact of stressors that remain?

Let's assume (and this is a big assumption) that you have put your best time-management foot forward. You have prioritized your work, delegated as appropriate, and dutifully allocated the time required for each activity. If you are still

left with too much work and not enough time (real or perceived), how do you answer question 2? Consider the following.

It has been said that “completeness generates energy and incompleteness drains energy.” Let's call this the “completion principle.” Think of a time when you received a psychological and/or physical boost from completing a task that required a large effort. Perhaps you completed that report, finally finished that project, paid off one of the kids' braces, etc. It is amazing how small accomplishments can yield so much energy. Likewise, think about a time (perhaps even now) when you just couldn't finish a particular task and it hung over your head, consuming your thoughts and mental energy. The clock just keeps ticking like a time bomb.

If these scenarios resonate with you, then you can probably relate to the completion principle. This is important because the positive effects of completeness can be the antidote required to overcome the negative energy plaguing your organization.

Completing a task(s) or significant steps as part of a larger task provides the following:

- the natural energy boost or second wind that comes with accomplishment
- a mental rest or recharge period before the next task begins
- an ideal time to encourage and recognize others for the important contributions and advancements they are making to the organization


For the facilities manager, fostering a culture of completion can be a useful tool to motivate the team. This culture involves having discrete tasks with specific schedules assigned to the right people. In addition, large tasks can be

broken down into a series of smaller tasks and milestones, whereby the responsible person can build his or her way to completion.

KEY: COMPLETION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Having run one marathon (my first and last), I can relate to the importance of the mindset of running a series of 26 one-mile races in lieu of a single 26-mile race. Often, completing one stage of a task will give a person the necessary energy to push through to complete the next stage, and so on, until the entire work is complete.

Another key element of this culture is making the effort to acknowledge the contributions of individuals as they are completing their assignments. There are many ways to say “thank you” or “good work, keep it up.” The facilities manager should be generous with this type of encouragement. It builds rapport and establishes a respect for the contributions of others. Finally, a resulting morale boost, in turn, could also reduce the occurrence of incidents (such as employee absenteeism) that add to the problem of time management in the first place.

How well are you taking advantage of the completion principle? If you need help you should consider prioritizing the tasks on your to-do list not only by their relative importance but also by their likelihood to be completed. Don't let the busyness of business drag you down—let the completion principle help energize and propel you. 

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