

Consistent and Clutch ... by Design

By Joe Whitefield



C Completion
O Organization
I Innovation
N Being Nice

I recently heard a coach say he prefers players who are more consistent to players who have more talent. What an interesting perspective. His follow-up comments addressed his ability to coach (manage) the game better when he knows what to expect from his players (good, bad, or marginal) and can depend on them meeting these expectations more often than not. In essence, consistency allows a good coach to execute a game plan that provides more situations that favor a team's strengths and fewer that expose a team's weaknesses.

This raised a question in my mind: How important is consistency in a facilities organization? Ideally, the business of the institution would happen on a schedule with predictable events nicely spread across the entire

calendar. Most facilities departments are proficient and can provide excellent services when there is adequate time and budget. Consistent demands met with consistent services; it is pretty straightforward. Just like the coach, we too can manage effectively when given the opportunity to deploy our strengths and cover our weaknesses strategically. Without a doubt, it is easier to manage when there is consistency in the demands for our services as well as the performance of our organizations.

The real problem occurs when the ideal conditions (adequate time and budget) are not present. The lack of time creates a condition of urgency. It is much more challenging to be effective when decisions must be made and plans executed quickly. Of course, inefficiency is costly financially as well -exacerbat-

ing the budget issues. One example of this is the often discussed preventative maintenance-vs-corrective maintenance management approach. The former has long-term cost benefits and fewer operational impacts, while the latter has long-term cost implications and operational impacts galore. And yet, time and budget issues continue to drive more and more institutions to the corrective maintenance side of the issue and the negative implications that follow. There is more urgency that increases the tension and leads to a reactive form of management that leaves everyone involved dissatisfied.

CONSISTENTLY INCONSISTENT

If inconsistency is the only thing that seems to be consistent in your organization, here are a few thoughts.

First, develop a plan for the unplanned events that routinely spring up. This means reviewing the previous months and years of your operations and see where you were caught short in your preparation. Could you have anticipated better? Are there patterns to these events? Are the conditions that led up to the event any different today? How many of these events were a simply a result of poor communication on someone's part? Once you have identified potential causes develop a plan to help these events surface in a timely manner so they can be addressed appropriately. Possible responses include:

1. **Initiating** "horizon meetings" with customers to review the future and improve communications,
2. **Designating** a portion of the workforce to serve as a response team that works on pop up events as necessary, and

3. **Working** to develop a budget mechanism that can be more responsive to events – something similar to a renewal and replacement (R&R) type of account. A little work in this area can help an organization become more responsive and less reactive.

Second, get out in front of the events with clear communication that sets expectations. In the south, nothing disrupts campus operations like snow. While snow removal plans exist, they are not always well communicated. By posting the plan in advance, customers can see the roadways and priority sidewalks that are scheduled to be serviced – and, more importantly, the ones that are not. While this doesn't eliminate all of the calls and complaints once the snow starts falling, it usually helps by establishing a consistent approach that shapes the expectation. Surely there are

other reoccurring unplanned events that could benefit from response planning and advance communication.

CONSISTENCY AND TIMING MAKE GREAT PARTNERS

Finally, when time and budget are not on your side, you must rely on timing. Sometimes it is not a matter of doing more with less, we are simply doing less. Reducing services is a necessary part of managing in tough times. Even so, we should still focus on what we are doing more than what we are not doing. With that in mind, it is important to review the schedule for services that are performed for the best timing that provides the most benefits. Services performed too early can degrade, too late simply miss the mark and are wasted. There are a lot of names and phrases that refer to this just-in-time type approach. The one I prefer is "clutch." To be clutch is

to understand the situations and trade-offs and still deliver the service when it matters most: performance under pressure. Every area of a facilities organization has an important timing mechanism. The key is to identify it and manage to it.

In short, consistency is a great friend to customer service organizations like facilities. We should strive to be more consistent by sharpening our anticipation, communication, and management skills. When the demands for our services and the events of the day are more sporadic, we should strive for a method of service delivery that is more responsive than reactive and can be appreciated for its timing and "clutch-ness." 💰

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