



# Artificial Boundaries Limit Success

By Joe Whitefield

**W**hat are the dimensions of an American football field? Most people familiar with the sport will say 100 yards. Some will even add to two end zones at 10 yards each for a total of 120 yards. But those are only part of the answer. After all, the field is a rectangle. How wide is it? The answer is 53.33 yards from sideline to sideline. If you knew that without looking it up, give yourself a hand.

To the average fan, the width of the field may not seem very important—we all know you score points by moving up the field and into the end zone. To the players and coaches, however, these sideline boundaries are crucial. Many plays are designed to go wide to find the space to advance the ball forward. Successful teams employ strategies that use the entire field.

In facilities management, there are many boundaries that affect performance. Some are true limits that are

real and definable (budgets, contracts, project scopes, organizational/managerial authority). Others are perceived and less definable (work environment, traditions, personnel attitudes). Many of the real boundaries are process oriented and structural in nature.

Conversely, many of the perceived boundaries are personal in nature. The perceived boundaries are the focus of this article. Many of us may be limiting our success by adhering to artificial boundaries—in essence, not using the entire field.

One boundary that should be examined is the empowerment of your employees. Are there employees in your organization who are demotivated, disengaged, or just not hitting on all cylinders? If so, they may be in compliance mode—they are working, but producing the minimum acceptable results. If this mode persists, it can become contagious. Over time, it

can become the recognized culture of the organization. To combat this condition, consider the following steps to reset the environment and start empowerment.

## IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS

Spend some time with employees to understand their issues and identify their skills, talents, and unique qualities. They may have more ability and potential than you know or they realize. Like a good coach or mentor, work with them to identify and move beyond any artificial boundaries that are limiting their perceptions and engagement. This requires high-level communication. To that end, listen more than you speak. And always hear what is being said, and what is not being said. The goal should be removing obstacles to understanding. A few tips on the subject from author Michael Kerr include:

- *Never assume you're on the same page—no one is a mind reader. Limit misin-*

terpretations with clear and specific instructions and information on the front end.

- *Watch your tone*—most workplace conflicts are due to how people say things, not what they say.
- *Use the right body language*—your posture, gestures, and facial expressions support or contradict your message in a similar manner to your tone.

### ENCOURAGE EMPLOYEES TO STRETCH

If you can identify an underutilized skill or talent, there is a real opportunity to help employees break the compliance mode and become higher performing, more motivated contributors. Be prepared to invest some resources in developing the skill.

An investment sends the signal that the employee is important and implies there will be an expectation to apply the new or improved skills for the good of the organization and the institution. This expectation is really an invitation for the employee to stretch personally and professionally, and is the beginning of empowerment. Done effectively, it can instill confidence and trust—leading to sustained improvement and excellence in place of compliance.

Management consultant Carol Kinsey Goman offers this perspective: “If you help people develop the confidence that they have marketable skills, then they can choose whether they’re going to stay with your organization or leave. When they choose to stay, you get commitment. If people feel ‘I’m staying with this organization because I have no other options,’ you will get compliance. But you’re never going to make it to the top with compliant employees. You need their commitment.”

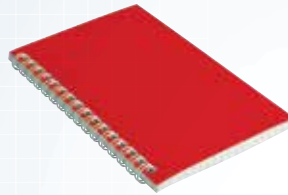
In short, there are numerous boundaries that inhibit creativity and productivity for some of our organizations. Some are real and immovable, and some are not. Empowering employees is a key first step to begin to move, even eliminate, some boundaries that restrict our success. Breaking through

the compliance-oriented culture by addressing poor work place attitudes can elevate the performance and status of the organization. The process is typically individual in nature and done person by person. With genuine leadership, positive effects can become contagious, drawing others into the flow. From there, engaged, committed, creative

employees can discover new methods and paths to success. Then it can truly be said that we are using the entire field. §

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## Guess Which One Doesn't Belong at a Desk.



A



B



C



D

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