

What's the Meaning of This?

Rediscovering the Value of Our Efforts

By Joe Whitefield

“Plan your work and work your plan.” That was a well-known phrase a former manager of mine used often to keep his staff focused on the thinking aspects, as well as the execution aspects, of our work. Like most facilities managers I know, he believed that planning and execution were inseparably linked and interdependent. I agree. Successful projects involve appropriate levels of thoughtful planning and competent execution. Unsuccessful projects typically are lacking in one area. Disasters typically are lacking both.

WILLING TO BE WILLING

While this phrase is useful in that it speaks to the mechanics of a project, it is also limited in that it is not particularly inspirational. It speaks primarily to the mental abilities and physical skills required of people to accomplish work. To

take it one step further, there must also be a *willingness* to accomplish the work.

Willingness draws on the intrinsic qualities of individuals such as attitude, desire, pride, and stick-to-itiveness. Willingness is the energy that fuels critical and creative thinking and morale that drives the physical efforts. And there is a cyclical nature to this type of work environment. Positive morale contributes to successful work and accomplishment which, in turn, boosts morale. Make no mistake, willingness and ability (or Will and Able) are the dynamic duo of accomplishment.

So, if your workplace morale is sagging a bit, what can be done to prop it up? To answer that question let's look at a major cause of the problem: namely, tasks that are perceived as meaningless by the people who perform them. Think back for a moment. Have you ever

C Completion
O Organization
I Innovation
N Being Nice

prepared a report or presentation for a meeting that was cancelled at the last minute? Perhaps you spent a lot of time and creative energy in your final product. It may have even been some of your best work. How did you feel when the demand for your work disappeared and your work was never read or seen? Even if it was part of the job and you received appropriate compensation for the effort, there was still something wrong. The term is *demoralized*. If you are like most people, this feeling had an immediate deflating effect on your attitude, energy, and morale. It may have even had a recurring negative affect the next time you were asked to prepare for a similar event. All because the meaning of the work dissipated and it became a simple task instead of an important contribution.

POINT OUT MEANINGFUL WORK

Demoralization undercuts the will and saps energy from people. Taken too far, it can be damaging. Remember the old prison movies where the prisoners dug holes in the morning just to fill them up in the afternoon? They performed mindless, busy work that held no value for them or anyone else. Day after day—simply to break their spirits. How awful.



While this is not the case in facilities management, there are, however, situations where meaningful work can seem meaningless to the employee if we are not conscientious. Be on guard for the following:

- Repetitive work—physical work that becomes so second nature that it is practically mindless. People need the intellectual stimulation of critical and creative thinking. Look for change, improvements, and new uses for old systems.
- Out of sight work—work that is scheduled during unoccupied or down times disconnects the workers from the customers who benefit from the service. The pride that comes naturally from seeing a satisfied customer is not available to these employees.
- Thankless work—this is typically a work environment that does not express appreciation enough. A penny's

worth of appreciation can produce a pound's worth of good will and motivation.

The antidote to the demoralizing environment is to find the meaning, value, or purpose in the tasks we all perform every day. Remind your employees often that they are part of something large and important. Help them see their work more in terms of providing services that are in need than that of performing simple tasks. And always take advantage of an opportunity to encourage them and say "thank you." Being needed, appreciated, and respected are definite boosters.

SHOWCASE THE IMPACT

I have recently seen a commercial that had a creative way of injecting meaning in the work of the employees and subsequently boosting their morale. The workers were from a plant that manufac-

tures medical equipment. The employer hosted an event where the workers got to meet several cancer survivors who were treated with the medical equipment manufactured by the employees. The impact on the workers was immense as they were thanked by the recovered patients and reminded, face-to-face, that their work was contributing to saving lives.

Tomorrow, try not to look at your calendar and to-do lists the same as you did today. Whether you are planning your work or working your plan, take a few moments to consider the good that will result from a job well done. Help your co-workers do the same. When you boost up Will see what happens with Able. ☎

Joe Whitefield is executive director of facilities services at Middle Tennessee University, Murfreesboro, TN. He can be reached at joe.whitefield@mtsu.edu.

 **DriWrap™**



Hydrophobic Aerogel Insulation

Tunnels
Steam Vaults
Tight Spaces
Removable Jackets

 **DriTherm™**



Underground Insulation

Steam
Hot Water
Chilled Water
Freeze Protection

High Performance Insulation & Corrosion Protection Products

www.dritherm.com

1-800-343-4188