

JoAnn Corley

"What we see depends mainly on what we look for."

■ John Lubbock

COUNT ON IT

-by Gary Lockwood

One of my clients (let's call him Mike) was telling me how important it is to him that he sell long-term maintenance contracts, not just ad hoc projects.

Makes sense. The long-term contracts provide some stability and predictable cash flow. They assist in getting closer to his clients. They also help him to borrow funds more easily.

So far, so good.

When I asked him how many of these long-term maintenance contracts he has already, he couldn't tell me. He didn't know! He said he's been too busy to track the number of such agreements.

Wait a minute! If this type of agreement is so important to Mike's growth strategy, how can he not know the status?

The fact is that most owners and CEOs know what's important to their enterprise, but can't (or don't) measure those things.

You've heard the old maxim: "You can't manage what you don't measure." You have also likely read the story of the "Hawthorne Effect".

In the late 1950s, the GE plant in Hawthorne, California brought in some consultants to measure the effect of brighter lighting on the productivity of their factory workers. The consultants first took productivity measurements to establish a baseline. Then they intensified the brightness of the lighting and measured again.

Productivity increased.

They increased the brightness even more and productivity went up again. After raising the brightness two more times, they saw two more increases in productivity. On a hunch, they lowered the lighting and measured one more time. Productivity went up!

They figured out that the productivity gains were not related to the brightness of the lights, but to the act of measuring.

They were paying a lot of attention to the effectiveness of their workers. And guess what? The workers responded by working more effectively.

What do you pay a lot of attention to? What are you constantly measuring, asking your employees about, talking about and looking at?

Complimentary Article

The Power of Focus

Measuring Results

When your team knows what's truly important to you, they'll likely pay more attention to those things, too.

Focusing on two or three key business metrics does something else for your behavior. It triggers your Reticular Activating System. Your brain is assaulted by thousands of messages each second. Everything you see, hear, smell, feel and touch is a message entering your brain. The Reticular Activating System filters through all these messages and decides which ones will get page one treatment - that is, arouse the brain.

One of the things we've learned from working with entrepreneurs is that you tend to pay attention to the things, which are important to you at the time. If your currently dominant thoughts are about creating a new brochure, you'll start seeing other brochures. You'll hear conversations about brochures. You'll pick up ideas relating to brochures and even notice colors that would be attractive for the new brochure.

In other words, the Reticular Activating System will pass through anything even remotely related to the important issue - the brochure.

From a practical point of view, this means that, if you want to solve a problem or achieve a goal, keep it at the top of your mind. Think about it, talk about it, write about it and imagine it completed. This is one of the reasons why affirmations work so well and why it is important to review your goals frequently.

If you focus on improving a specific key indicator of your business success, your Reticular Activating System will pass through sights, sounds, people and ideas even remotely related to that point of focus. In other words, if you measure it visibly, frequently and attentively, it will likely improve.

Here's my suggestion: Identify the two to five key measurements and key indicators that are important and essential for your business. Set up an active system to measure and track these indicators. Talk to your employees about it at every opportunity. Put charts and graphs of these indicators on the wall of the lunch room. Make your interest in these metrics very active and visible.

Chances are, you'll get what you're looking for - improvements in these areas. Count on it