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SMALL BUSINESS RESOURCES

Becoming Better by Doing Better

A basic part of human nature yearns to achieve, to accomplish, to attain – to do better in the future than in the past. Through the ages, philosophers, poets, heads of state, commanding generals, businesspeople – leaders of all types – have tried to light the fires of enthusiasm and kindle the flame of motivation to glimpse the heights they might reach, the happiness they might enjoy, and the depths of reward they might gain from using more of their potential.

The term, productivity, captures the essence of this human pursuit of becoming better and doing better. Productivity, in fact, has earned recognition as the key to personal and business progress, success, and survival.

What is Productivity?

Since improving productivity is vital in today's competitive world, a clear understanding of the term productivity is essential. Productivity is defined by some from an economic standpoint. Others take a management viewpoint, while yet others look at productivity from other perspectives. A simple definition that applies to all businesses and individuals is that productivity is the measure of how efficiently goods and services are delivered. Productivity in a broad sense is concerned with the overall effectiveness of getting things done. In a narrower business sense, productivity is doing what it takes to make more money.

From a personal perspective, productivity enables you to earn your income. Overall, productivity means making more from your available resources; it means investing time in tasks, activities, or responsibilities that provide a high return to your organization and you. Productivity is determined by working on high payoff activities, and high payoff activities mean spending time doing the right thing, in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time. When you spend your time on high payoff activities, you will be more productive. You will be working smarter, not harder!

A firm is doing its job when it increases the bottom line, not just operational efficiency. Regardless of your particular business, profession, or career – whether you make a product, sell a product, or provide a service – improving your productivity is the force that propels continuous improvement. Continuous improvement adds to your sense of personal accomplishment, professional success, and pride in a job well done.

Identifying and Using High Payoff Activities

The familiar 80/20 Pareto Principle operates in time use and personal productivity. Approximately 80 percent of the results you obtain stem from 20 percent of the tasks you perform. The other 80 percent of your tasks produce only 20 percent of the results obtained. It makes sense, then, to identify the most productive activities in your daily schedule and devote more time to these high payoff activities – activities you perform that bring you closer to achievement of your goals. High payoff activities are specific to each individual, so giving examples is difficult. In other words, because different people in various businesses, organizations, or situations have different goals, their high payoff activities will be different. Simplify, delegate, or eliminate other low payoff routines and activities that absorb too much of your time. This common-sense approach frees you for productive work on high priority items.

Benefiting from the Pareto Principle may require changing some patterns of behavior. And change may be perceived as risk. But remember, success is often built on a series of events all of which involve a certain degree of risk. One who never risks never achieves. One who lives by the principle that "It is better to be safe than sorry" is likely to be both unsafe and sorry, left behind by progress and regretting opportunities missed.

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Risk, however, must be carefully assessed and planned. With deliberate use of the Pareto Principle, eliminating activities can be worth the risk. Anticipating risk can even fuel your enthusiasm and motivation to overcome and conquer.

Establishing a Base Line

Improving personal productivity is never an accident; it begins with precisely defining productivity in your particular situation. Only when you know what productivity means to your business, can you increase it. You can take deliberate, purposeful steps toward improving your productivity when you learn to measure it.

Base lines for productivity differ according to the business you are in; consequently you must be the one to formulate your base line and express it in terms most useful to you. Generalizations are helpful in gaining an overall understanding of productivity, but you must identify measurable factors specific to your situation.

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