

## IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS THAT RISE ABOVE THE “CHECK THE BOX MENTALITY”

**When workers perform a task with the sole purpose of simply getting it accomplished, the “Check the Box Mentality” comes into play. This occurs for three reasons:**

- ◆ The person has numerous priorities, so most or all get minimal time and attention: in the company’s culture, it is worse to submit an incomplete list of tasks accomplished at minimal standards than a majority list of tasks performed superbly.
- ◆ The tasks are undesirable or outside the person’s comfort zone: but who knew how that person felt about certain assignments and challenges other than he or she?
- ◆ Staff are left to their own devices to determine quality: there has been no clear distinction made between the performance levels of “meets expectations”, “exceeds expectations” and “outstanding.” And then there is the fact that there are often small or fractional percentage differences in the amount of compensation from one level to another: checking the box to get something done easily can be regarded as a good trade for the stress of getting it done really well.

**People who have a “Check the Box Mentality” often:**

- ◆ Fail to prepare for meetings in which their participation is necessary and for which they have received advance information
- ◆ Focus on their own needs to the exclusion of others in both tasks and conversation
- ◆ Skip checking spelling and grammar before printing/sending written documents and messages
- ◆ Don’t act when observing actions, circumstances or practices that present risk to co-workers or to the company
- ◆ Feel that it is more important to get it done fast versus spending extra time to get it done well
- ◆ Will delegate or “hot potato” the tasks they don’t like to do
- ◆ Are inconsistent in their at-work behavior; act better when the boss is around
- ◆ See what others get away with and go the way of the crowd
- ◆ Don’t think about the end user when performing their work
- ◆ Will expend the minimum amount of effort: just enough to keep the boss at bay

**It is a fact of life that most people will strive to do well what they most enjoy doing. But that definition of “well” is what gets business into trouble. It varies from person to person, across the company, without regard to level or status. This definition is a result of influences such as:**

- ◆ Experience and exposure
- ◆ Personal preference and style
- ◆ Observations of other people’s practices within the company

**So what enflames the desire to be great instead of good?**

- ◆ Knowledge of expectations and standards
- ◆ Leaders that practice what they preach
- ◆ Recognition and encouragement for innovation, creativity and initiative
- ◆ Excellent compensation for excellence
- ◆ Personal satisfaction
- ◆ Rapid detection of and follow-up on slackers
- ◆ Investment in education for skills and knowledge

**Do the following things in the following order to improve the quality of service, products, and output:**

1. Sit down. Write down your standards for excellence. Consider the table on the reverse. Now put them aside until you perform the next steps.
2. Find out what your people are working on and discuss the priority level of each task. We can guarantee that you may think you know what they have to do, but you don’t know all of it. This is the perfect time to explain how the employee’s work translates into service, profits, etc.
3. Ask for any impediments or challenges that are a part of getting each task done extraordinarily well. Find out what corners are being cut to get work done, and determine the acceptability of those shortcuts. If you can’t decide then and there, think about it for a spell, consider the impacts and risks, and get back to the employee with your decision. Be sure to explain your reasoning when you do, and invite discussion.
4. Inquire as to what people most like and least like to do: take notes – this is valuable information.
5. Learn from your people how they think their own tasks or those of others they interact with can be done better, to a higher standard. Ask what tools might be helpful to maintain efficiency while performing at a higher level. We bet you’ll hear a few surprises here.
6. Now go back to your list created in Step #1 and reconcile your standards with reality. Make necessary adjustments, and for Pete’s sake, make sure they are standards YOU will practice before imposing on others.
7. Hold a meeting with your people and share how you will all prosper under the better, higher standards you have selected for success. Discuss how it can be done, get buy-in and then revisit your results in a month. Celebrate the positive changes!

**IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS THAT RISE ABOVE THE “CHECK THE BOX MENTALITY”,  
CONTINUED**

**Face the Facts**

- ◆ Nobody ever said it is easy to be great. But flip that around: it takes a lot of mental effort to concoct plausible excuses and rationale for subsequent explanations about substandard work.
- ◆ Everyone has little peeves and dislikes.
- ◆ Some people are just a lot more anal than others.
- ◆ Everything will break down once someone who does not meet standards is allowed to escape unscathed.
- ◆ People will look to the boss for exemplification of the standards, and when the boss slips, the standards are at risk.

**Determine what is Important**

Here are some factors to consider before raising the bar of expectations. For every task that may need quality improvement, there is an impact that has value and/or certain results. The impacts described below demonstrate either who or what may be affected by the new standard, and the value/results reflect the benefits to the company.

IMPACTS	
1	Clients (Members/Guests/Subscribers/Patients, etc.)
2	Clients' customers
3	Subsidiaries, partners, affiliates
4	Sales personnel
5	Service colleagues
6	Manufacturing staff
7	Production crew
8	Technical group
9	Front line staff
10	Operational employees
11	Internal users
12	External users
13	End users
14	Company culture
15	Morale

VALUE/RESULTS	
A	Eases process
B	Improves service
C	Generates revenue
D	Prevents/limits errors
E	Reduces risk
F	Promotes teamwork
G	Ensures regulatory compliance
H	Saves time
I	Reduces/eliminates confusion
J	Saves money
K	Raises safety levels
L	Elevates market image/potential market share
M	Decreases response/turnaround time
N	Improved equipment life/performance
O	Feels great

Now create your task list and ascertain which impacts and values/results that higher standards will engender (see the example below). This is the information you will be taking back to your team to explain the reasons for boosting your standards and gaining their acceptance.

TASK	IMPACTS	VALUE/RESULTS
1. Tell ALL staff to greet or acknowledge INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL clients with genuine friendliness and courtesy at <b>every</b> interaction	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14	B, C, F, L, O
2. Institute a mandate for picking up any visible debris in walkways, hallways, work areas, display areas, etc. This includes rubber bands (can cause slippage), paper clips, price tags, etc.	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	D, E, F, F, J, K, L, N,

**Before you Let Loose with Higher Standards**

Think about the consequences of failure to meet new or higher standards before you implement them. If the consequences outweigh the benefits, is it worth it? Will the effort to monitor conformity be too onerous to enforce or will you be limited to a hit and miss follow-up approach? Can you sustain your own personal practice of and belief in the new standards? It can be worse to implement certain performance expectations that are allowed to slide than to let the status quo live on.

**At the Meeting:**

Whether you meet one-on-one or in groups to discuss the new, higher performance standards, you need to break the new expectations down into actionable items that drive the behaviors and skills that you are trying to augment. This will give people a good understanding of what they will need to do to excel. They should also recognize that their observance of better practices will lead to greater rewards in terms of evaluations, bonuses, recognition, etc.

**A Great Tool for Tracking Performance, Goals, Objectives, Project Tasks, et al:**

Now that you have identified and agreed upon the actions people will take to sell more, serve better, deliver on time and increase output quality, how are you going to follow up? Help is here! ActionPlan Mapper™ makes follow-up and reinforcement easy. It is a web-based, hosted software package that requires no installation, downloads or plug-ins (no IT support). It is easily self-customized to meet the unique needs of each organization, including terminology, themes, colors, logos, etc. It is configurable and operational in one day. Participants receive email reminders to regularly report progress. Real-time reports are simple to view, and adjustments to priorities or accountabilities are quickly and easily made. ActionPlan Mapper™ is now available from Zenger | Folkman, the same great people of The Extraordinary Leader Program. In fact, they built this incredible tool to make it easier for people to actually implement what they've learned. Call or email us for a 15-minute online demonstration of ActionPlan Mapper™. Or, for more information, check out ActionPlan Mapper at [www.zfco.com](http://www.zfco.com).