



Do You See What I See? Overcoming Complacency

Making change requires that you to be dissatisfied with the status quo. Unfortunately, people get conditioned over time to accept mediocrity, poor work practices and bad behavior. There's a name for it: Complacency.

It is difficult to self-identify complacency in the workplace. People tend to 'accept' that things are the way they are and move on. Or in some cases, because they can't figure out how to provide better service or deliver better performance, they assume it can't be done. Complacency is the biggest barrier to change and the strongest roadblock to achieving excellence.

Bringing in a fresh pair of eyes is a great way to identify long standing issues that have been accepted over time. As a new VP of Customer Service I made it a point to have face-to-face meetings with employees. It provided me an opportunity to share my passion for excellence, allowed me to get to know employees and facilitated a conversation on how to achieve exceptional service.

At the end of each meeting I asked folks for their input on what could be done better. On one such occasion a customer service associate said "It would be great if someone could keep the customer service system from kicking us off the system every day." Unaware that we had this issue I continued to ask questions. Apparently every evening around 6 pm the mainframe would kick associates off the system while they were handling a customer call. This had been going on for many years. When I asked if they had discussed the issue with their supervisor, they said "everyone knows". It's been that way for years. I looked at the leadership team and they said the issue was brought up in the past but apparently no one could find a fix so year after year, they just dealt with it. The entire organization had grown accustomed to the problem and just accepted it.

Being a continuous improvement zealot I made it my personal challenge to get the issue fixed. After a few phone calls and investigation, I found out that our IT group started running overnight scripts at 6 pm which put stress on the system and caused the associates to get kicked-out of the system. Once we got this figured out, IT delayed running scripts until after the customer center closed and the problem was solved. The customer care associates were delighted, our customers got better service and we all learned three key lessons.

First, bringing in a fresh pair of eyes is a great way to identify issues that may be constantly overlooked due to complacency. Second, people closest to the work are usually eager to provide input if you are willing to ask them and listen. And third, just because something hasn't been fixed doesn't mean it can't be fixed – be relentless in your pursuit of excellence.