



15 minutes a day – focus on the employee

Imagine that starting tomorrow you would use 15 minutes a day to focus on other people. Or rather, that you would focus on what your employees are doing, how they are thinking, how they are managing their work, and how they are solving problems. Your job is to be as curious as possible in an honest way – and put your own agenda and your own solutions to the side for a moment. You're probably already doing some of this – but probably not fully. Do you want to learn how to change this? Here are a couple of useful methods.

When you take an interest in what someone else is doing, there is often a task to perform or a problem to be solved in the background. What we are describing here is to just listen and take an interest in the perspective of your employees. During these 15 minutes, you're not there to tell them to do something specific or to tell them how you perceive something. You are just – there.

Does it sound like a waste of time? Yes, this might feel a bit unusual. Some feel like it's a bit out there, or that it lacks direction. However, it's quite the opposite! Consciously setting aside time for your employees has proven to be time well spent, if you want to create value from other people. In this case we're talking about value in terms of faster work, higher quality and lower costs.

Using this type of non-evaluating attention, you increase the chance that your employees feel considerably more motivated. People thrive and experience a higher level of influence when their leaders take part in what they're doing; you might say they feel "noticed". Some need more of this and some need less, but your attention will influence how they perform.

In addition, you gain lots of important information, enabling you to make better decisions. This applies not least to those who work independently, or who act in the role of an expert. To a greater extent, now you *know* (at least on some level), instead of *thinking* that you know. You can find great ideas directly, and discover neat things that are being done silently, and also make corrections when needed.

Look out for the trap of micromanagement

What if these "15 minutes" is experienced as a way to oversee, control or interfere? Yes, the risk is there if this turns into a forum for critical comments or micromanagement. It turns into a thing where you go around and interfere with people. That's why it's incredibly important to ban your own rebukes during these 15 minutes. It's easier said than done to hold back the desire to chime in or tell a story from your experience. Your employees might also have bad experiences from their past. You can count on it that they at the start will be a little bit cautious; now it's your job to make sure that they have new, positive experiences.



To increase the chance of success and to know what you should be doing during these 15 minutes, we've put together a program draft (found below). You need to be strict when you make the schedule and stick to what we are suggesting during your "15 minutes of leadership" in order for it to fill the intended function. What your employees are doing is key, not their spontaneous reaction but rather what's happening after a couple of hours and days.

Schedule 15 minutes/day Monday – Friday

To guarantee results, you work in loops where you use the 15 minutes on Monday to plan the rest of the week's 15 minutes, practice during Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and sum up what you've learned on Friday. The 15 minutes on Monday and Friday – where you only plan and reflect – are just as important for the program.

Take part in your employees' work day

In order to help your employees in improving their performance, you need to know how they are doing their work and how they are influencing their surroundings. We recommend that you use your 15 minutes to gather facts and to make observations in order to gain insight in regards to how they act. Your task is to take an interest – completely and fully – in what they are doing and saying. Literally put aside your own documents and your computer/phone and take part in your employees' work day.

The art of keeping your solutions to yourself

What you're doing is a combination of a clear structure (where you are in command) and listening (where you are open for potential content). A common mistake is to propose solutions too quickly and to base your actions on your own experiences. This might be what is expected of other people, but this time of attention can be used as practice in doing the opposite. With this in mind, stick to two verbal techniques: ask open questions and summarize.

OPEN QUESTIONS = questions that encourage answers that are harder to give a yes/no answer to in contrast to closed questions, where the goal is to confirm or to give specific information). Examples of open questions: "What do you want this report to lead to? Why did you choose this theme? How did you schedule your work?"

SUMMARIZING = summarizing information that other people have said in order to ensure that you have understood it, pin-point the most important details or to move forward. If you are used to summarizing, you can avoid uncertainties and unnecessary misunderstandings.



How do you know that it's working?

You have the opportunity to make your employees happier and more motivated to perform. For you, it should mean that you can better support your employees and know what you can prioritize. In terms of what results you should be looking for during the first weeks, you should focus on the fact that your employees are more comfortable with your presence and that you get information that helps you in your work. Using the 15 minutes every day, you should be able to see results in just a couple of weeks, even if you're already doing things the right way.

Think of it as an exercise

Try the training program for a month and evaluate it afterwards. Most of your time will be as usual, but during 15 minutes per work day – 15 minutes, 5 days a week – you put other things aside and follow the program. It's less than 3 percent of your time if you work full time, so it could be worth a try.

A weekly program, 15 minutes a day

Mondays: plan in detail

During the 15 minutes on Monday you make a schedule for the 15 minutes of the week: Who are you talking to this Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday? It can be one or more people, the same or different teams/people during the week, depending on how the work place/group is organized.

- Book the exact time with the team/people
- Write down open questions adapted to the situation/role

Tuesday – Thursday: three different ways to monitor

Following your employees (monitoring) is done differently during the three weekdays:

TUESDAY: Talk about the work: Walk to employees that are physically close to you. Call or have a video meeting if they are located far away.

WEDNESDAY: Stand next to them: Ask if you can sit in on part of a meeting that your employee is responsible for, listen to part of a presentation or watch as they perform a task and ask questions.

THURSDAY: Take note of results: Study a product that someone has made, read a document that someone has written or watch how they have filled in a template.

REMEMBER:

- Ask open questions and listen to how they are prioritizing and solving problems. Make sure that you have understood.
- Keep corrections/opinions regarding what they should do to yourself, even if they are doing other things than you are expecting. Corrections should be saved for later (if they are not urgent). It's important that your employees feel encouraged to show/tell.



- Finish by thanking everyone and summarizing what you have gathered. If there is something you want to return to, schedule a time for it.
- If you are getting feedback, listen and try to understand. You can save your own opinions for later.

Friday: summarize what you've learned

During the scheduled 15 minutes on Friday, you summarize for yourself what you have learned and how you are moving forward. Set a timer on your phone and get started:

- **BACKWARD:** What should be followed up on? What good performances/ideas have you gathered?
- **FORWARD:** What should be prioritized next week? In terms of your actions, what should you keep on doing and what should you change?

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Schedule the 15 minutes of the week <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who/what • Time, place • Prepare questions 	Talk about the work Ask open questions Summarize	Stand next to/follow/ask them to show Ask open questions Summarize	Take note of results/product Ask open questions Summarize	Summarize the week <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have you learned? • Plan ahead

Questions and answers

What should I say I'm doing?

Tell them that you are following a program with the purpose of having a look at how everyday work is going, and with that in mind helping your employees develop, work with the correct questions and get the support they need. Describe in detail how it will work and that you will be asking a lot of questions because you want to understand, and that it will feel unusual to start but that you're going to give it a shot.

What do I do if there is an urgent question where I have to micromanage?

Of course, urgent questions have to take precedence. However, always ask yourself: "Can this wait for 15 minutes?". If that's the case, park the question for later by summarizing it and make a note of when you want to return to it.



If a third party is present, what kind of info should he or she get?

If you are not expected to be there you should explain why you're there and there could be a need to discuss rules/roles. Otherwise it isn't necessary to say anything.

Can I do this even if I'm not currently in a leadership position?

Sure thing. An important thing in that case is that you talk about it with your manager and relevant person/team and explain the program.

Advice for parents: Try it out on your kids! If you can't do it for 15 minutes, try it for 5 or 10 minutes, ask questions and summarize what they are doing. It will most likely be a fun experience for you and your kids.

About the writers

Annika Strömsten and Maria Forsgren at Wenell Management work on spreading knowledge about how our way of acting and communicating influences our surroundings. They are specialized in converting science into tools that can be used in everyday life and developing new, efficient ways of practicing skills. Their motto is that small changes in how you act can give great results, both individually and organizationally.

They are both licensed psychologists with a background in behavioral analysis, where you will find the keys that govern human behavior. Annika and Maria both have extensive experience in training leaders, both in Sweden and internationally. They primarily work on developing communication skills in leaders by practicing different kinds of feedback and follow-up by both behaviors and results.