



Become the leader that you want to be

How about using 15 minutes a day on something that has been proven to increase motivation in your employees? We're saying that it's possible, primarily if you're in some kind of leadership or coordinator position. You don't have to attend a crash course in order to get better at giving your employees attention, gathering ideas about good initiatives or helping them – and you – to prioritize. You can start digging where you're standing, in the middle of your daily work. You shouldn't do more, just different. In this article we're describing a less known but proven efficient leadership technique called monitoring. You can implement it in small steps in your everyday life, 15 minutes a day.

Since we need to practice the connection between a new behavior and the situation that it's supposed to be used in, it's entirely possible, and even preferable, to use everyday situations. Kind of like if you have acquired a height-adjustable desk. Although the action in itself is simple, it requires you to adjust to the habit of varying your work posture in order for it to become a natural part of your everyday life. You also need to be convinced that this change is more important than other new habits right now. To put it in simple terms, you cannot manage too many changes. If you were to implement too many changes you might end up interrupting your work every minute in order to perform gymnastics, drink green smoothies, or clean up your inbox.

The art of taking an interest in your employees

The first issue lies in choosing. To choose means to opt out, which doesn't sound very attractive. However, this doesn't mean that tasks with lower priority will be of less quality. On the contrary, it's common for these tasks to get a boost in the wake of other changes, but you need to focus on one thing at a time. In reality, you will do as you normally do, but you put some extra effort into a couple of chosen behaviors. You decide to practice these in particular – again and again. It's just like in sports; if you want to get better at tennis by considering three pieces of advice at the same time (stand with your side towards the net, mind your feet, and look at the ball) it gets harder than if you practice one thing at a time. The same thing applies to leadership practice; the chance for it to have an effect increases if you make a choice.

This time, we have made the choice and created a practice program for one skill that tops the list regarding efficient and appreciated leaders – but it is also a skill that is a little bit of a hidden gem: the art of taking an interest in your employees – also known as *monitoring*. A scientist in the U.S. (Dr. Judith Komaki) has for several decades been studying what characterizes good team leaders, and has found that “monitoring” tops the list of efficient leadership skills. Even though there is plenty of evidence that suggests that leaders who



monitor are both more appreciated and deliver higher quality of work, there's only a few who practice it in their daily work, probably because it can feel like a waste of time.

Talking to your employees every now and then and taking part in what they're doing will be a telling example of what monitoring can be. Do note that this is something completely different than *controlling*. The difference lies in the aim of the behavior: to get to know what the employee is doing and how he or she solves problems, rather than reviewing it or correcting it. Monitoring can also be to read a report or to stand next to someone as they are using their equipment.

There is nothing wrong with the willingness

Evidence suggests that leaders are spending a big chunk of their time on the "wrong" things – things that don't contribute the most to the bottom line. It doesn't happen consciously; usually it's just easier to answer a couple of e-mails first, or to give some practical advice. The feeling of being efficient in the moment is usually a trap. We are also influenced by social factors; it can feel more comfortable to stay in a meeting, even if it's no longer productive. A lot of line managers describe how they are "stuck" in administrative work and an unreasonable amount of meetings. It's also common to be lured into becoming too operative, not least for project leaders.

If you can identify with this and if you want to see how far you can go by changing your own actions, you need to start working systematically. To want to do something is not enough – and usually there is nothing wrong with the willingness. Studies show that many leaders are using their time on other things than they'd like – and what they think that they should do. There are probably many things you would like to change – but remember to make a choice. There might be some things you need to do before you test our suggestions – to monitor 15 minutes a day.

In other words, this is about going to a training camp – but you're still at your workplace. Move away from thinking that "everything should be done in one fell swoop" towards doing a little at a time and then build on that. To consciously DO leadership, a little bit every day. Work on steady improvement, test and learn, test again and thus work in loops where you are continuously evaluating the effects of your actions in your everyday life. Don't wait for the perfect moment to start change, begin in the middle of the mess.



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.