



BEST PRACTICES

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Do office superheroes hurt profits?

*If we are all running faster and faster,
just where is it we are all headed?*

It's easy to be swallowed up by the constant flow of information — the pings, clicks, beeps, alarms and various reminders from people and electronic devices that demand our attention. How many times have you heard people say they couldn't finish one thing or another because they "ran out of time?" In reality, they were seduced by the call of the urgent.

Companies with urgency-driven cultures have employees who are out of sync with the audiences they serve. They've formed a reactive culture built on service recovery, creating an anxious work environment where burnout is common. In the landscape industry in particular, customers demand proactive service and responsiveness. But when unexpected problems, emergencies and interruptions dictate your relationship with customers or employees, it is called crisis management. And it erodes profits.

Stephen Covey wrote about the "Urgency of Addiction" back in 1996 in "First Things First" — before smart phones, social media and email made time management even more challenging. Sometimes, the tone is set by a management whose members live in a zone of urgency and enjoy the whirlwind and attention that atmosphere creates. They like being hero managers, always coming to the rescue and fixing things.

Companies that fail to address the issue lose business and jeopardize profitability, thanks to service recovery spending, overtime costs, and a general lack of efficiency. Often, in diagnosing the profit shortfall, they fail to identify the true problem.

Solution strategies

Correcting the problem is not hard, but it is nearly impossible, unless, that is, the company commits to making fundamental changes.

That involves several things:

- ▶ You need a plan that addresses how the company should do things in a proactive manner.
- ▶ You need to establish a culture of accountability, where people must follow the plan and work proactively.
- ▶ You must discipline people when their lack of planning, discipline and organization sets them back on the road to firefighting.
- ▶ You must be willing to invest time in fixing the causes of the problem, not just the symptoms.
- ▶ Leadership must be aligned in recognizing that a culture of constant crisis is a serious obstacle to success... and align in fixing it.
- ▶ Finally, you must not personally fall prey to the addiction.

The benefits of instilling best practices in crisis management are enormous. A proactive culture has motivated employees. They take pride in their work and serve your customers better. In fact, they are happier because they are not distracted by chaos. As a result, customers are satisfied with the service they receive and continue to invest in the relationship. It is a win-win for the customer, the company and the employee. The company grows, and profits improve. If it sounds too good to be true, try it and see.

Effective crisis management is a critical skill. My version of an old Chinese proverb says, "The superior manager prevents crisis. The mediocre manager attends to impending crisis. The inferior manager treats crisis."

Which one are you?

