

COACHING TIP

From Rex C. Houze

Insight Precedes Change... the Role of Stats in Success

Championship athletes and teams keep statistics to improve performance and results. In basketball, statistics include shooting percentage (field goals, 3 point and free throws), rebounds, steals, assists, and turnovers. In baseball, it is batting averages, earned runs averages, slugging percentage, on-base percentage, stolen bases, walks, strikeouts, and fielding average. Similar categories exist in every sport.

Unfortunately, in business, too many people think they are too busy “working” to keep statistics. When you keep track of the appropriate statistics and monitor them on a frequent basis, you can work smarter instead of harder and you will have more time for important tasks.

A manufacturing company had a horrendous absenteeism problem. It was costing them a lot of money in overtime and temporary services. Mistakes were being made and they were losing customers. Management tried everything they could think of to correct the problem, but without success. During a management development process, the problem surfaced and the facilitator asked some insightful questions that produced some startling results.

His questions involved who, what, when, where, how, and why. When he got to “When is it occurring?” the answer was “We don’t know.” And he said, “Let’s find out.” The team gathered statistics from the previous six months and presented them several different ways. When they looked at the *per day* statistics, the insight paid off. They found that Monday through Thursday attendance was in an acceptable range, but Friday attendance missed the mark drastically.

When the managers were asked why they thought this was happening, they said it was probably because they paid people on Thursdays. When asked **why** they did that, the classic response was because we’ve always done it that way. When asked **what** would happen if they changed payday to Fridays, the response was “We don’t know.” The facilitator said, “Let’s find out.” They changed payday to Fridays and their absenteeism problem shrunk to an acceptable size. The benefits were substantial. Without the insight, the problem would probably still exist today, or worse yet, they would be out of business.

Do you have lingering problems that you have not been able to solve or goals you have been unable to reach? Take a new look at statistics that are available to you and/or set up a scorekeeping system to get new statistics. Electronic spreadsheets are a great way to look at a set of statistics in many different ways so you can gain additional insight. Ask questions starting with who, what, when, where, how, and why to identify opportunities for improvement.