

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS – THE POWER OF EFFECTIVE SCHEDULING

“Managers who set schedules have complete visibility over the day-to-day activities of their business unit.”

Why do we need a Schedule?

Schedules in the workplace are a critical factor to organizational success. Schedules that are translated from business forecasts and resource plans are directly aligned with organizational goals, and if managed correctly allow for timely performance measurement and variance action. A schedule should set clear expectations for employees, dictating who is responsible for a task, what the task is, and when the task is to be carried out.

Schedules will allow both managers and employees to identify barriers to performance and provide both visibility and clarity of targets within the organization. Although it is inevitable that schedule variances will occur during the course of normal business, having a schedule to work from will allow for better management of variances and the expectations of customers or stakeholders.

Daily Schedule Reviews are Critical for Success

In order for a schedule to be effective, managers must use the schedule as a tool to measure an employee’s performance. Employees must be actively managed – that is, they must be given SMART expectations (**S**pecific, **M**easureable, **A**chievable, **R**esults oriented and **T**ime bound) – and they must be followed up with on a regular basis to ensure that the schedule is being attained.

Daily schedule review checks with employees will allow a manager to:

- Hold the employee accountable to the tasks that have been assigned to them
- Identify variances from the plan and understand reasons for the variances
- Identify barriers to performance and help to eliminate them
- Recognize when an employee is not able to perform to the standard that is required
- Set the expectations for the next schedule review and ensure that the employee is aware of what is required of them

Employees will benefit from having a Set Plan

Although the introduction of a schedule into a work environment that has not typically been “micro-managed” may seem unnecessary to an employee, they will quickly realize that it is in their own interest to have their workload set by a schedule. Schedules force employees to manage their own time effectively, and ensure that they are given an appropriate amount of work to be completed.

Schedules often promote two-way communication between an employee and manager; in order to ensure that a scheduled activity is completed to plan; all expectations must be clarified in advance. Managers who have not set clear expectations will immediately be

faced with any issues that are outstanding and can help to remove the barriers to performance that is stopping the employee from completing a task. Any gaps in requirements will be identified and any other issues that come up in the process of completing an activity can be dealt with at the time they occur so that the employee does not get frustrated with their work.

Employees will also be able to better manage their employer's expectations by committing to a schedule in advance. If a manager's expectations are out of line with what an employee is able to achieve, the employee will be able to identify this when the schedule is set, realigning productivity expectations and allowing the employee to manage the work that is being assigned to them and avoid workload imbalances.

What's in it for Managers?

Managers who set and manage the schedules of their employees have complete visibility on the day-to-day activities of their business unit. They will better understand their employee's capabilities and understand where the gaps in resourcing lay.

If a scheduled activity cannot be completed as assigned, daily schedule review meetings will allow this to be identified and corrected immediately. Often when an employee has a list of activities to complete and no set schedule, a barrier that comes up will cause them to move on to another activity of their choice. Managers that are able to identify this barrier as it occurs are able to re-prioritize tasks for their employees – often managers will have more information than their employees on the importance of tasks and will be able to shift tasks to best benefit their business unit.

When managers are given the heads-up that something will not be on schedule, they will be able to better manage the expectations of their customers or business counterparts. The early warning of a delay or barrier in a process will be taken with much more understanding from stakeholders and can be approached with collaborative problem-solving efforts. Last minute delays or hindrances only serve to upset parties involved in the process.

Schedules help to align Strategic and Operational Goals

When strategic goals are translated to operational targets that are managed by a schedule, the measurement of schedule attainment will allow for timely measurement of goals. This practice of setting schedules, measuring schedule attainment, and identifying and eliminating barriers to performance will drive continuous improvement within the organization.

If schedules are not met, employees should be able to provide reasons for the variance in plan. These reasons, when fully understood by both manager and employee, will lead to an analysis of the root cause and the development of a solution to eliminate the barrier. By correcting variances on a daily basis, the manager can better align their business unit for successful target attainment on an ongoing basis.