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Practice Management Information for Implant Dentists

PERFECTLY MEDIOCRE MANAGEMENT BY DALE DAUTEN

“When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself: The people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous and surly.”

That cheery wake-up call is from Marcus Aurelius, who, despite embracing the concept of low expectations, knew something about getting things done; he ruled the Roman Empire for nearly two decades and is remembered as the last of the “Five Good Emperors.”

What got me thinking about Marcus A. was reading an article from “Quality Digest” by Davis Balestracci. That article includes this Zippo of a line: “... your current processes are *perfectly* designed to get the results they are already getting.”

In other words, if you don’t like the results you’re getting – the mistakes or the incompetence, or, worst of all, the indifference to the mistakes and incompetence – consider that the system in place is designed, perfectly, to do produce just that. Or, said another way, every problem is a design problem.

Marcus Aurelius came to mind because he wrote this: “Everything that happens happens as it should, and if you observe carefully, you will find this to be so.” Wayne Dyer, who was not one of the five good emperors, but who has penned some good lines, argues, “Everything is perfect in the universe – even your desire to improve it.”

So if you want to improve your universe by upping the quality of your organization’s output, you have to figure out how to redesign the processes that are producing it, which often means changing the organizational culture. Balestracci argues this: “Quite simply, culture is created by what is tolerated.”

When I spoke with him about his article, Balestracci went so far as to take on the greatest excuse of all, the lack of time or resources. He said, “Lack of’ is NEVER an option as a response – it only is because the culture has tolerated it as an option.” (More about Balestracci’s work, including a link to the article discussed here, at www.dbharmony.com.)

Circling back to Marcus Aurelius, he wrote in his “Meditations,” “A cucumber is bitter. Throw it away. There are briars in the road. Turn aside from them. This is enough. Do not add, ‘And why were such things made in the world.’” Put that in terms useful for a modern manager, “I don’t care why it happened, I only care that it doesn’t happen again.” That’s efficient. That’s effective. That’s intolerant.

Compare those simple notions to the sentences that Balestracci quotes from consultant Peter Block, who calls them “habitual language” to which we become “anesthetized:”

“Leaders need to provide a good role model.

We need to be customer focused.
How do we get people on board and aligned?
How do we hold people accountable?
We need a clear and common vision.”

What happens when you hear management say those things? They make you wonder -- Wonder if anyone will notice you're checking your Blackberry, wonder if there's a decent game on TV tonight, wonder if Wayne “the universe is perfect” Dyer ever had to sit in a management meeting. In other words, your mind makes a decision that it has better things to think about. Management that speaks in clichés is management that tolerates mediocrity and what is tolerated is the culture.

Remember that line from Davis Balestracci: “Quite simply, culture is created by what is tolerated.”

Hmmm. “What is tolerated.” If that's true, then the solution is to be intolerant? Exactly. Intolerance is one of the great secrets of management and perhaps its most underutilized resource.

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