

"Clayton?" asked Terry, the leader of the Tuesday morning seminar, nearing the end of the list of registered employees.

"Here!" blurted a young man in the second row, his head down but his hand shooting into the air.

"Great. How about Dani?", asked the leader. "Yo!", from over to the left, by the window.

"OK, and ... Erin?" asked Terry, moving to the last person on the list.

"Uh huh", responded a voice from the near the back.

"Super, everyone's here. Let's get started." Terry checked off the last name and set the roll call aside. At the end of the day, he'd turn it in to management along with the students' feedback forms.

Since kindergarten, we've all become so used to roll call that it's now second nature and we hardly think of it. In school, on sports teams, at meetings, and in the workplace, we've gotten used to keeping track of who's here and who's not, whether by a casual look around, a roll call, or with a formal, punch-the-clock time-tracking system.

Companies keep track of how many hours each person works and how many days off they take for vacation and health. Management wants to know, down to the minute, how much time each person is putting in and what they're working on. Fair enough - you pay by the hour, and maybe you bill by the hour, so you need to know how many hours someone is working. But, and it's a big but¹, don't confuse keeping track of time worked with management; don't confuse measuring with managing. Often, managers end up looking at visible numbers but not seeing the big picture, they count trees without seeing the forest, they use clichés without understanding the meaning, or they use too many redundant, unnecessary examples to make a simple point.

It's often said that "you can't manage what you can't measure", and many books and articles have been written on that topic². The thinking is that unless you can directly measure something, and maybe generate some reports and charts, you can't manage it. It's a common trap, relying on visible numbers instead of really understanding what's going on and managing the process and the people.

One article³ says "Metrics are a part of our everyday lives: from our heart rate, to our bank balances; from our weight, to the gas mileage on our cars. If we don't pay attention to these numbers, we



1 See also "Baby Got Back", 1992, Sir Mix-a-Lot.

2 Search for 'manage measure' at online bookstores for many examples.

3 "If You Don't Measure, You Can't Manage", Laura Patterson, Nov 2004, <http://www.marketingprofs.com/4/patterson1.asp>

create a risk for getting a heart attack, being overdrawn or running out of gas.”

The problems with this kind of thinking are many. People still get heart attacks whether they measure their heart rate or not. People who look at their bank balances still bounce cheques and standing on a weigh scale doesn't magically shed pounds. Measuring doesn't change anything; it only tells you what has already happened. Measuring attendance, profit and loss, or the results of a survey, tells you what has happened, but is quite separate from the process of managing, of creating the future.

If you want to prevent heart attacks, you need to know what causes heart attacks. You need to have knowledge about diet, exercise and stress management, and understand the effects of genetics, personality and environment. You need knowledge about the body's systems, understanding of how those systems work, and wisdom to predict what will happen if you make this change or that.

To stop bouncing cheques, you need to understand cash flow, and know not only the balance, but the outstanding payments, fees, and deposits that are expected to hit your bank account. You also need to know how to control your expenses, investments and impulses so that you always have enough money available.

In all of these cases, measuring gives us a visible number, something we can write down, chart and report on. This can give us an idea of progress but doesn't really give us any useful information on how to produce the changes we might want. Weighing yourself can tell you if you are heavier, lighter, or the same as a month ago, but it can't tell you how to change your weight to achieve your goals. Managing your weight requires more than measuring the visible numbers; it requires knowledge about how to lose weight.

So let's check on Clayton, Dani and Erin and see what value we've gotten from the visible number, from taking the roll call and knowing that they were at the seminar. Over the next weeks, management notices that none of these three seem to be applying what they learned in that seminar, almost like they hadn't been there. In frustration, despite positive student reviews of the seminar, management calls in Terry, the seminar leader, complaining that nobody had learned anything in his course. What happened? The students were all there. Didn't you show them the material? Why couldn't they use it?

It turns out, Clayton had been at a party the night before the course, and during the course, he was wired on caffeine and nursing a fierce migraine. Present and accounted for, but not enough brain function to take in a word that was said.

The day before the course, Dani's whole department had gotten unfairly chewed out after failing to meet yet another of boss "Random" Randy's arbitrary production goals for the previous week (another example of using visible numbers). They hadn't met the quota Randy had set, and he let them know how disappointed he was. During the seminar, Dani was upset, unmotivated, and spent most of the day trying to decide whether or not to quit.

**Don't confuse
measuring with
managing –
measuring tells you
where you've been,
managing gets you
where you want to be.**



Erin had been exhausted at the course, worn out from months of caring for an ill and aging mother. Every day was a struggle for Erin but, with no more vacation or sick days left, there weren't many options. Go to work, get paid, help mom, do it all again.

To evaluate the course's success, the easiest measurement for management to get was the attendance; how many people were at the course? The next easiest was probably student feedback forms: From 1 to 5, 1 being excellent and 5 being crappy, how do you rate the instructor? How do you rate the course material? How relevant was this material to your job? Again, a whole bunch of numbers that are easy to measure, but not really much value when it comes to managing. These numbers completely ignore the effects of motivation, presenteeism⁴, fear of getting chewed out, and many other things which directly effect how employees can do their jobs. Managing requires more than just measurement, more than just visible numbers. As Albert Einstein said, "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."

1. During the miniunit how satisfied were you as a learner?

_____ very satisfied

_____ satisfied

_____ unsatisfied

_____ very unsatisfied

This is not to say we need to discard numbers and measurements, but the next time you're keeping track of employees, or measuring the response to a survey, or looking at profit and loss, think about Clayton, Dani and Eric and consider what you are ignoring when you're looking just at the visible numbers. Don't confuse measuring with managing. Measuring, and visible numbers, can only tell you where you've been. Managing, with knowledge, understanding and wisdom, can get you where you want to be.

⁴ When employees show up at work, but aren't really able to work well because they're sick, tired, upset, or distracted.