8/1/2019 | 3 MINUTE READ

Minutes, Moments, Metrics and Mission

Is it possible that we focus a bit too much effort on minutes and not enough on creating moments?

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"There's a difference between minutes and moments," the speaker espoused in a recent presentation I attended. His point that we often spend more energy focusing on time and deadlines than we do on experiences got me thinking about our obsession with time in the finishing industry.

We spend a lot of energy on time. We measure efficiency by calculating takt time, cycle time, parts-per-minute, and direct and indirect labor hours. Our machine availability is gauged by changeover time, capacity utilization and machine downtime. Customer satisfaction depends on on-time delivery and our lead times.

We use revenue per quarter, operating cost per quarter, net income per quarter, earnings before investment, taxes, depreciation and amortization, and return on investment over time and to assess financial health.

Safety is reflected in our days away restrictions, transfers calculations and days without a workplace injury. Quality is defined by rejects or returns per hour, day or month, and regulatory performance by noncompliance events per year. Minutes, hours, days, weeks, quarters, months, years. Time, time, time, time, time, time, time.

Is it possible that we focus a bit too much effort on minutes and not enough on creating moments?

Doubtless your organization uses minutes (and hours, days, weeks, quarters and years) to measure performance. Take a few of these precious minutes to reflect on the most important moments in your career. Come up with three.

How many of them referenced a performance metric that included a measure of time? If you're like me, not one. The three I came up with were moments, not metrics.

They include the evening I was having dinner with members of our leadership team when someone suggested we go around the table and tell about a person who changed our lives for the better. When it came to one of our younger team member's turn, he pointed at me and said, "I'm looking at him."

Another that came to mind was the day the president

of our company's labor union told me his members were dissolving their organization because they trusted the company leaders more than they trusted the union leaders.

A third occurred when an ex-offender, who had been working as a material handler in one of our plants, went out of his way to thank me, with a tear in his eye, for the company birthday card I had signed for him as he explained that people like him didn't usually get birthday cards.

As we reflect on our careers, what we are most proud of is likely defined by moments, not metrics. If this is true for leaders, it is even more true for their team members.

Article upon article reflects research to determine what the newest generations of the workforce want from their jobs. The list includes attributes such as freedom, social impact, flexibility and diversity. An article in *Forbes* suggests that candidates view the website of the company that is recruiting them and ask if they see themselves represented at the company, going on to say, "if you see a dozen white men and generic language about the business's purpose … ask if this is a reflection of their workforce, customers and goals."

Another question candidates are encouraged to consider is, "what do the company's leaders care about?" Another way of asking this question is, "does the company have a stated mission, and does it genuinely place the mission above its metrics?" Earlier this year, I met a young midlevel executive

who left a lucrative career with a *Fortune* 500 power products manufacturer to work for a family owned manufacturing company. As he explained it to me, "I just got sick and tired of every meeting beginning and ending with a discussion of what we were going to do to make our quarter. I decided that there had to be more to business than that and in my new position with a genuinely mission-driven company there is." He wanted to work in a culture of moments, not metrics.

Not surprising in the articles about what younger team members want from their jobs is the absence of any reference to machine downtime, parts per hour, indirect labor hours or inventory turns. Not that these are unimportant. Of course, we need to measure our performance if we are to continuously improve our organizations, but organizations that put mission and moments before metrics and minutes might find that they can improve them all. I did.

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