

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



884 Managing By Walking Around – Do it Right

It's one of the oldest management methods on the books. A lot of leaders have used it and still do. The only problem is, the majority of them do it wrong. I'm Jerry Roberts and we'll talk about the mistake they make when they employ the tactic known as "management by walking around," next, on The Extra Point.

Management by walking around, sometimes known as management by wandering around, is thought to have originated — as a specific management strategy — at Hewlett-Packard in the 1970s. However, managers making spontaneous visits to employees in the workplace has been a common practice in for a lot longer.

Let me start off by saying I highly recommend it for all organizational leaders, and especially those with multiple offices or work locations. If your employees are scattered around a bit, I believe they need to see you on a regular basis. How regular that is can vary.

Some managers choose to make their rounds every day, some do it two or three times a week, and on the other end of the spectrum, it might be every couple of weeks. My personal opinion is that more is better. In any case, visibility is important.

The real issue is what do you accomplish when you walk around. Let me tell you a quick story of a CEO who, I believe, took the wrong approach.

We'll call this CEO Allan. He made his rounds every day, seeing the bulk of the company's 75 or so employees. Most of them would just wave at him and give a greeting. He'd ask how they were doing. The majority of days, all was fine and he'd go back to his office. However, on a number of those days, it didn't turn out that way.

Allan would notice something was out of place, perhaps a minor safety issue. He would direct

someone to deal with it. The computer system had trouble, somebody had an HR problem, and there was more. Allan patiently listened to each of the concerns or complaints, made notes, and later called the respective managers to address the issues.

He started wondering if this walking around concept was really a good idea. Every time he went out, he came back with stuff to do.

This went on for a few weeks. Allan made his rounds, people told him their troubles, he made notes and discussed them with his management team. One day, one of those managers said, "Boss, can I be straight with you?" Allan responded, "Of course you can." The manager said, "When people tell you their concerns, instead of making notes and telling us later, can you ask them to talk with us? Some of these things we've never heard about, until we hear it from you. We're the supervisors. Don't you want them coming to us first?"

That hit Allan pretty hard, because he thought the management by walking around was a good thing and he didn't want it to end.

He was getting some executive coaching, and he told the coach that the walking around thing wasn't working how he had expected. He asked if he should change the approach, or just give it up.

The coach suggested changes. First, to honor the requests of his managers. If a worker raised an issue, he'd direct them to talk with their supervisor. If he saw something that needed to be fixed — and it wasn't an immediate risk — he messaged the supervisor. There was something else.

Allan's coach made it clear that Allan was the company's number one cheerleader.

(Con't.)

He should be seen, be upbeat, thank the workers for their great efforts, have some fun with them, even share some thoughts on his vision for the company's progress and planned growth. Sometimes, he'd grab a soda with people on break time, sharing stories and ideas.

These changes made all the difference in the world. The supervisors felt supported, and Allan was free to just be social and motivational, which was what he wanted in the first place.

Management by walking around is a solid strategy, if you do it right. If you're a leader, I highly recommend it. Be that cheerleader.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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