



Throughput Consulting, Inc. Article – for Publication

Remember Parkinson's Law?

If you are at least fifty-five years old, you may well remember the publication of C. Northcote Parkinson's humorous and insightful book, Parkinson's Law: The Pursuit of Progress. As a young man, Parkinson worked for the British Civil Service. Being a keen observer, he quickly realized that a successful bureaucrat does two things very well. First, he creates subordinates, not rivals; and second, he makes work for other bureaucrats. He could have added a touch of procrastination as he came up with his famous law: "Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion."

In a different vein, but with the same result, managers and owners must be very careful not to give employees incentive to do the wrong thing! I will never forget (this was about 1980) learning of a foundry in up-state New York who promised their employees a one-time bonus based on shipments in the month of November. There was nothing in the bonus formula about quality or customer returns, so the employees simply packed and shipped everything remaining in the cleaning room during the three days before Thanksgiving. The owners had to borrow \$250,000 to pay the bonuses, and then – a month later – another \$500,000 to cover the delay in receivables due to customer returns. Within fifteen months, the owners sold out.

At the better extreme, I worked for a company right out of college who purchased one pair of safety shoes per year for each employee. But the rule was: The shoes must only be worn at work. Well, one Monday one of the hourly folk came to work quite worried ... carrying his shoes. One was mangled beyond repair as the steel toe had been ripped right out. He had nailed it with his rotary mower, foot inside. Yep, a bit bruised, but no real damage was done to his foot. I was gratified and impressed that the policy about wearing the shoes only at work was reversed that day and employees were now encouraged to wear them when doing work around the home.

Let's consider another insightful law: Tell me how I am to be measured, and I will tell you how I will act. How do you feel - how do you act – when you step into the shop at 2:00 in the afternoon and find a couple of employees leaning against a column and chatting? And, how do they act when they see you? Do they break up and head in opposite directions? That would be a clear indication that they know you're not pleased. Or perhaps everyone sees an opportunity to share a round of coffee and a little idle chat. Now that would be good for everybody! Here is why. If employees know that idle time is frowned upon, they will make whatever work they have fill up their day so as not to appear "idle" and then, Parkinson's Law kicks in!



THROUGHPUT | CONSULTING, INC.



THROUGHPUT | BLUESTREAK™

If everyone knows that idle time, just like an empty furnace, is unused capacity, then everyone knows that there is opportunity here. Make the most of it! How else are we be able to deliver the rush order and take on new work?

Oh, yes. I have a corollary to Parkinson's Law: Junk expands to fill the space allotted for its storage.

Author:

Patrick Burdick, Metallurgical Engineer, MBA

Throughput Consulting, Inc.

Developers of Bluestreak™ QTI, Shop Floor & Customer Portal

www.go-throughput.com

patrick.burdick@go-throughput.com

1-888-785-0509 x706

Copyright ©2008 – Throughput Consulting, Inc.