

It Works. Does it Perform?

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A friend was telling me about a new leadership role she had taken. She loved the work, but what she really wanted to talk about was her team.

“They are incredible,” she told me. “They work hard. Every time I walk through, everyone is busy and engaged. Half the time I hate to interrupt them.”

She had noticed something else, too. At the end of the day, the work was done. Not some of it. Not most of it. They consistently cleared their daily tasks before they left.

I asked how they managed to stay on top of everything so well. She laughed. “I asked them the same thing.”

She had stopped during one of her walk-throughs and asked the team about what she had been observing. They explained how they divided the work, who handled what, and how things moved through the process. They had a system for keeping the work moving, and everyone knew their part. When she asked how they had come up with the process, though, no one really knew. It had been in place before most of them arrived. “I guess we’ve just always done it this way,” someone told her.

My friend was delighted. She had inherited a hardworking team, they worked well together, the process worked, and they got things done. “They’re making me look great,” she said.

Earlier in our conversation, she had told me about an improvement initiative she was excited to take on in her new role. So I went back to it. “How does this process support that initiative?”

She thought about it for a moment before answering. “I don’t know.”

That answer didn’t change anything she had observed. Her team was still hardworking, engaged, and getting their work done every day. Their process still worked.

Some things never change. Others should.

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