
The Manager's Role in Embedding Continuous Improvement

This piece is an extract from the BRONZE SILVER GOLD (BSG) guides for facilitators and the line managers of teams engaging in continuous improvement using the BSG.

Embedded continuous improvement is a culture

The manager plays a very important role in ensuring that the culture of continuous improvement is embedded in the team. 'Culture' is witnessed as behaviours exhibited by the members of the group. The manager will directly influence these behaviours by his or her own behaviour (consciously or unconsciously) and managers must therefore consider themselves as role models from which others will take example.

Here are two examples of this:

I know an MD and owner of a conference centre and hotel. He regularly parks his Jaguar in the space by reception, where a sign quite clearly declares '10 minutes parking only. This space reserved for guests checking in'.

This may seem to be a minor transgression and he being the owner, he can do as he likes – can't he? But ask the people who work for him what message this gives – not only does it build an 'us and them' attitude, but it also says to them that customers don't matter. As the forty or so people who work in this business are customer-facing, this is a very bad behaviour to cultivate. I have heard some say '*why should I bother – he doesn't!*' and they will do the *minimum* required of them. Delighting the customer – going the extra mile - is most definitely *not* in their behaviours.

The second example is one I read by Jim Kirkpatrick, author of 'The Kirkpatrick Four Levels – a fresh look after 50 years'.

Here is a story of two men who seemingly have the same job. The first is a man that I (Jim) saw in front of a hotel in Asia. While I was waiting for a taxi, I went up to him and asked him, "*What is your job here at the hotel?*" Without looking at me, he answered, "I wash windows". Since we had little else to talk about, I went back to my taxi.

The next day I was in Brunei, conducting a workshop. During the break, I wandered over to this young man (washing windows) and asked him "*What is your job here at the hotel?*" Chai stopped what he was doing, walked over to me and said "*I am part of the team that creates exceptional experiences for our guests*" After I picked my jaw up off the ground, we carried on quite a conversation, which included Chai (who introduced himself by name) asking me about my stay, if I had everything I needed and what I thought of *his* grounds and *his* country.....

...Chai told me about his orientation, training and the coaching and encouragement he received from his supervisor. He was taught that he was in training in order to *learn, perform, enhance his career possibilities and ultimately serve as an ambassador for his resort and his country.*

Managers set priorities

Managers also influence what their team members do by what they set as priorities. Team members will assume what is a priority by what the manager asks for – or by inference does not ask for!

The Bronze Silver Gold Programme works by encouraging members to be involved through attending audits, participating in workshops and by undertaking ownership of the various actions that arise from audits and workshops. Managers can show that these things are important in the same way that they show other things like work schedules and health and safety to be important: by talking about them, asking about them and investing some of their time in ensuring that their people are engaged and that the improvement actions are fulfilled.

In the same way that time spent on embedding Health and Safety thinking brings its return by avoiding time lost to accidents, so time spent on BSG activity will be paid back ultimately through improved processes and a more motivated workforce.

As an example of how much time managers might spend on improvement, consider a former MD of one of the Hotpoint sites of 600 people, Dave Turner, who devoted two solid days a month to attending all the progress reporting of the live improvement projects (typically around ten at any one time), delivered to him verbally and in person by the project teams. This was in addition to informal feed back he received when he walked about the site. What message did *this* send to the team? That these projects and the team members mattered, that he wanted to see results and he was willing and able to assist, where support was needed.

Managers set examples of behaviour

The Management and Team Leader Launch presentation explores the behaviours that a manager involved in a Bronze Silver Gold implementation should exhibit. Every manager is encouraged to attend this presentation, prior to a team launch of BSG. A list of management behaviours has been put together by Jane Warrander of Aberdeenshire Council, here reproduced.

List created by Jane Warrander, Aberdeenshire Council

What must I do to ensure success of Bronze Silver Gold?

The strength of the Bronze Silver Gold programme lies in its focus on real problems, on getting the team involved in solving these problems, and on finding and implementing solutions that deliver lasting, measurable improvements. Managers should adopt a supportive leadership role with their team that encourages participation and involvement.

Your full commitment is essential and must be demonstrated in the following enabling ways:

Adopting a supportive leadership role with your team...

- By participating in improvement activity with your team
- By following the vision for achieving excellence in performance through the BSG model
- By being involved with briefing/team sessions
- Ensuring team members are available and cover is provided if needed for improvement activity
- By ensuring those who need the time to carry forward any implementation of improvement actions get it
- By continuing to engage with your team to encourage, monitor and sustain continuous improvement activity
- By unblocking any problems around the improvement action plans generated by your team
- Celebrating with your team the attainment of each accreditation level towards being a Centre of Excellence

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