

Als Manager oder Abteilungsleiter haben Sie wahrscheinlich alle Hände voll zu tun und schaffen kaum Ihr Tagespensum. Dennoch sollten Sie sich Zeit für einen Gang durchs Büro und zwanglose Gespräche mit Ihren Mitarbeitern nehmen. Ein solches Management by Walking Around kann Wunder wirken.

TAKING A STROLL AROUND THE OFFICE

As a manager or supervisor you are probably swamped with work, stressed out and have difficulty finding enough time in the working day to get everything done you would like to get done. However, this should not be an excuse for failing to find time to speak with your subordinates.

We live in a digital age that has *enabled* the global workforce to be better connected, more interactive and have access to information immediately available. Unfortunately, this frequently results in less face-to-face interaction as it is often easier for a manager to *fire off* an email than speak to an employee directly. Consequently, some *maintain* that today's workforce is less *engaged* in the company than they should be. One possible solution is MBWA, which *stands for* management by walking (or *wandering*) around.

MBWA is not new. Although one historian, S.B. Oates, maintains that it goes back to Abraham Lincoln, who informally inspected the Union Army troops during the American Civil War, it was *pioneered* by the two founders of Hewlett-Packard and became popular in the early 1980s and 90s. However, it was the management guru Tom Peters who, having studied successful companies and their practices, turned MBWA into a buzzword, stating in his book "A Passion for Excellence" that he saw managing by wandering around as the basis of leadership and excellence.

At this point, some managers might think that MBWA is not necessary in their company since it already has an open-

door policy. This means that all the managers' office doors are left open in order to *encourage* every worker to feel free to enter any office and approach a manager at any *level* in order to discuss any subject at any time. Well, that's the theory. In practice, this *rarely* happens. Many corporate cultures are such that managers are seen as being distant and *unapproachable*, particularly by junior members of the department or workers on the *front line*. Staff might feel *intimidated* by managers who they *perceive* as important people whose time is too valuable to be wasted by a relatively trivial problem. Open-door policies are often not enough on their own to help organisations solve problems close to where the problems occur. This is where MBWA may help to *bridge the gap*.

So, what exactly is MBWA and how does it work in practice? It is, in fact, just what the expression *implies*. A manager or supervisor takes time to *drop in* on the employees' workplaces for an informal *chat*. Talking with people face to face gives them a sense of how they feel towards their work, how things are going and hopefully find out if anything is troubling them or causing problems. The emphasis is on casual, impromptu discussions where there is no obvious

agenda. This may involve chatting at the coffee machine, in the corridors or wherever the employee works, be it in an office, *warehouse* or on the *shop floor*. The aim is to break down barriers to communication so the discussions should be relaxed and not *stiff* or formal.

MANAGEMENT BY WALKING AROUND

MBWA should be a regular part of your daily work but not as part of a schedule organised in advance. You will find out more when people aren't expecting you and are unprepared for your visit. Be certain to visit everyone who reports to you or is in the team and avoid spending more time with one particular group or only speaking with those of a certain *rank*. You don't want to be *accused* of *favouritism* or create office *rumours*. Take this opportunity to inform employees of the company's *goals* and visions, philosophy and *values*. Although you will be talking with people, the emphasis is on listening to what they are saying and understanding who they are, what they do and the *issues* they *face*. Ask for feedback, encourage suggestions for doing things better, listen to their ideas for improvements or making work easier and, when back in your office, *reflect* on what they say and take effective action. If someone's suggestion leads to a positive outcome, *give credit where it's due* and make it known whose idea it was. This will encourage others to speak out in the future. If there's a problem or question, be willing to give help either on the spot or, if that's not possible, get back to the person at a later date. However, should you see someone underperforming or *witness* a situation that *gives rise to* criticism, don't react immediately. Keep it in mind and deal with it at a later time in a different setting.

MBWA is not only about company issues. Discovering which football team someone supports, whose child has *chickenpox* or who is training to take part in a marathon is not *wasting* company time. Being able to comment on this at a later date plays a role in breaking down barriers to communication and helps your staff to see you as a person and not just a boss. It not only makes you more approachable but increases company *morale*.

It may sound easy but don't expect immediate success. At the beginning you may find that workers are *suspicious* and feel they are being spied on or they may give the *impression* that you are a *distraction* they would rather do without. There will also be limitations which could *restrict* the effectiveness of the MBWA such as geographic locations – there is only so much ground a person can cover and the amount of time you have available will probably be fairly limited. Another aspect to take into consideration is that even when an employee trusts you they may be unwilling to give an open and *candid* assessment of a situation, particularly if it means being critical of a fellow team member, supervisor or boss.

The conversations may not always be productive but they will, over time, deliver advantages. They will help you

to form stronger relationships with your colleagues and subordinates and build up trust. Communication channels will improve and you can find out about problems you would otherwise not have heard about or better still, learn about issues before they become problems. Clearly, MBWA is not just taking a stroll around the office. It requires time, effort and *commitment*, but in addition to any *tangible pay-offs* it might *yield* at some future date, you may also find that you enjoy it.

<<< Judith Fortey >>>

accuse, to	beschuldigen
agenda // ə'dʒendə	Tagesordnung
bridge the gap, to	eine Lücke schließen
candid // 'kændɪd	ehrlich
chat	kurzes Gespräch
chickenpox	Windpocken
commitment	Engagement
distraction	Ablenkung
drop in, to	vorbeischauen
enable, to	ermöglichen
encourage, to // ɪn'kʌrɪdʒ	ermutigen
engaged // ɪn'geɪdʒd	beteiligt
face, to	begegnen
favouritism // 'feɪvərɪtɪzəm	Begünstigung
fire off, to	hier: senden
front line	vorderste Front
give credit where it's due, to	jdm. etw. hoch anrechnen
give rise to, to	zur Folge haben
goal	Ziel
imply, to	bedeuten
impression	Eindruck
intimidate, to	einschüchtern
issue // 'ɪʃu:	Problem
level	Ebene
maintain, to	behaupten
morale // mə'reɪl	Betriebsklima
payoff	Erfolg
perceive, to // pə'si:v	wahrnehmen
pioneer, to // ,paɪə'nɪə	vorangehen
rank	Dienstgrad
rarely	selten
reflect, to	nachdenken
restrict, to	begrenzen
rumour // 'ru:mə	Gerücht
shop floor	Fabrikhalle
stand for, to	bedeuten
stiff	steif
stroll	Spaziergang, Bummel
subordinate // sə'bɔ:dɪnət	Untergebene(r)
suspicious // sə'spɪʃəs	verdächtig
swamp, to	überschwemmen
tangible // 'tændʒəbl	konkret, greifbar
unapproachable // ,ʌnə'prəʊtʃəbl	unnahbar
value	Wert
wander, to	umherwandern
warehouse // 'weəhaʊs	Lager
waste, to	verschwenden
witness, to	beobachten
yield, to // ji:ld	einbringen