



## Sludge Removal

Dizzy Dean, the great Detroit Tigers player and broadcaster, once described a runner thrown out at second base this way: “That feller spent too much time running in one place!” If that sounds like your typical day, read on.

You and your management team are feeling tired, overworked, and underpaid because you’re spending way too much time and effort on the things that don’t really matter. You’re working on the wrong stuff.

In today’s hospitals, the 80/20 rule predominates. Twenty percent of your time is spent on the stuff that counts, while 80% gets spent on trivial trash—the re-dos, do-overs, and problem employee discussions. Don’t forget to add the time you spend retraining because so many of your workers become unhappy with this sorry mess, smarten up, and leave.

And who’s responsible for this work environment continuing? Since the mag is titled *Health Executive*, maybe it’s you? Whatever your hospital’s state of affairs, you can sharpen your management team’s performance by expressing clearer expectations

about what tasks need to be done. Start by concentrating on productive work—the only kind you’re supposed to be doing. That means focusing on the seven key results areas (KRAs): customer satisfaction, quality, innovation, professional development, culture, productivity, and economics.

Once you begin focusing on the KRAs, implement this prescription for effective management approaches from the Dazzling Doctor:

- **Train ’em.** Struggling organizations typically have no management development worthy of the name—you need eight to 10 days a year as a minimum, plus 360-degree evaluations to remove the limp performers and annual goal attainment for recertification.
- **Use ’em.** Enough already with the outside rescuer consultants coming in with the ready-made boilerplate solutions. Instead, spend the dough to show staff problem-solving techniques and the experimental method. With some shovels like that, staff will soon get the “stuff” out of the stable and build their management muscle.
- **Tool ’em.** Here’s a useful rule of thumb: If the choice is doing a task by hand that takes more time or buying the tool to save the time it takes to do it by hand, 90% of the time the economics favor buying the tool. So get more stethoscopes, wheelchairs, and computers. It’s tool time baby.

• **Recognize ’em.** There isn’t enough tea in China to pay healthcare people what they’re really worth, but a kind word, pic in the paper, and birthday balloons are at least a start. And I mean a lot of this, every day, every department, every person.

• **Date it.** Every policy, procedure, and piece of equipment should bear a freshness date. No later than five years after onset, it should be calendared for review and either refreshed or removed. Unless you have someone to kill off the past, it will choke off your future.

As the organization increasingly becomes focused on its core tasks and moves away from dead outcomes, you’ll stop spending so much time running in one place. Your people will become re-energized and experience a lightening of the spirit. A side benefit is the re-engineering of the human system. As Robert Townsend wrote, “If you don’t do it excellently, don’t do it at all. Because if it’s not excellent, it won’t be profitable or fun, and if you’re not in business for fun or profit, what the hell are you doing there?”

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