



The (not so) Hidden Standard

by Hannah Thomas

If you have been through a standard work training, you know how easy it is to produce the “evil” variation by not following standard steps, especially if those steps are not clear and precise. Even then, over time, if we get a little too confident, feel pressure to produce more at a quicker frequency, or start to get lazy, variation will creep in and our outcome will likely suffer. So, how does that translate to your routine? Let’s dig into this!

Tried and True

As I was brainstorming with our team on how to write this piece, the fantastic Scot Burbacher broke down my mess of thoughts to a very succinct statement, “A routine plants the seed for standard work.” Routines are the key to my survival. If I break my routine, I am likely going to wash my hair with face soap and forget to feed the dog . . . don’t judge me. On the flip side, if I follow my routine, my hair and my dog are better off because the outcome of that routine produces the expected results: clean hair and a happily nourished puppy (pictured right, isn’t he the cutest!).



PIVOT, With An End Goal In Sight

I might be wrong in my assumption here but do most of you feel like you were pushed/forced to modify or create a new routine when the pandemic hit? Did you struggle with this? I did! The process of creating a new routine takes time and consistency, but once established, anyone who is a part of that routine should understand the steps, have the right tools, and know the expected results. All of that, put together, helps with achieving desired outcomes. But we are creatures of habit, change is hard, and face soap is expensive, so how do we modify or change routines due to environmental factors and still arrive at the desired output?

Setting an alarm for a consistent wake-up time, making the bed, brushing teeth, getting dressed. These are all examples of standard work that are the result of routine. Pre-pandemic routine and current routine share similarities and differences. Getting ready for work definitely looks different but components of my pre-pandemic routine remain the same. First, alarm, a subtle chime of bells gently pulls me out of sleep and I make the bed. Second, COFFEE. Third, brush teeth. Fourth, pick out my best athliesure to rock for the day (I know you can relate). Next, grab my to-do list, my laptop and prepare to slay the day. Obviously, these are high level steps in my morning routine, and I have left out a lot of the details (because honestly, who cares?) but this is how I set myself up for success EVERY DAY! When/if I deviate from the routine everything feels off, like I have forgotten something and sometimes it is elusive but if I retrace my steps (a highly effective process that is a quality control measure of sorts) I can usually pinpoint where things went awry.

If we look at this from a work product standpoint, let's say handling a training request, we can find many similarities to the example above. Our office handles many types of training requests from individuals, managers, and agencies, so the first thing we make sure to do is be consistent with our messaging. Next, we work with the requestor to understand their needs and set standard expectations so that everyone is on the same page. The goal is to meet the needs of the customer while keeping the outcome and effort the same for each request. Each participant, regardless of agency or need, will have a clear understanding of their next steps for training that will advance them on their lean journey. Likewise, if you take a look at our [website](#) you will find several examples of standard work that our team has put together to help our network navigate the steps for using specific tools, provide trainings and to facilitate events.

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Deviating from the routine changes the outcome, causing uncertainty and confusion, sometimes creating an opportunity for manipulation or exploitation. More simply put, variation = chaos. This might sound extreme but it is my present truth. Routines take time to develop, time to refine and reinforce, and usually require a lot of explaining for those persistent "why's". When we are forced to change our routine for any reason, it is critical to take the time to explain the differences, observe what is working well and what still needs refining, and monitor for variation to help with the overall adoption and ease of the changes. Routines are highly personalized, from the way we develop them to how they evolve over time, hopefully optimizing the effort to results ratio (some people still do routines that seem loaded in waste to us, but it works for them). Once we feel we have personally optimized the routine, it becomes standard and thus achieving the expected outcome.

Have you established any new routines or made modifications to existing routines while working from home? What has worked for you? What has not? Send us an email to leanohio@das.ohio.gov, we would love to hear from you!