

## ***The Power of Habit***

**Executive Summary:** Although policies can be created overnight, getting them to function and last in your organization takes time. Read here about the value of persistence.



**Change is tough.** We're in the construction business and many of you reading this are doing it as a professional *in America*.

Change for us American constructors doesn't come easy. I know when I read an article, or during my visits to places like Japan or Europe, there's a lot of cool things there we're still catching up to.

Whether it's a change in technology or in policy, change doesn't come easy. It's not in human nature.

**Administrative changes need habit.** When it comes to administrative changes, I tell myself and others just to get the policy or procedure implemented and do your best to comply with this new requirement. And keep at it until it becomes habit.

Let's take for example an operations meeting. Everyone's too busy to have one on, say, a weekly basis. But, how do you start one and then sustain them? The answer is by habit.

Here's what happens to all of us (because we're only human) – the 1<sup>st</sup> week we had the meeting and it was new and great, the 2<sup>nd</sup> week we forgot, the 3<sup>rd</sup> week we had only half attend, then the 4<sup>th</sup> week we did but it ran a little short, then the 5<sup>th</sup> it lasted only five minutes because the General Superintendent had to go to Corporate, but the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> weeks went perfectly. Now we're in our 8<sup>th</sup> weekly meeting and we now start to see the habit forming. It's working!

It took two months (8 weeks) to get the cats herded, but look what we have now – we have a functional operations meeting.

If you don't have the persistence, the drive, and a procedures champion, it will not work. But, once it becomes habit, it will work forever!

**What other habits can I instill?** Take the time to improve your company by doing things regularly:

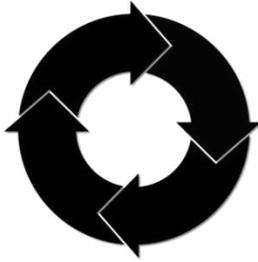
- **Trench shoring** – use it every time your 3' or 4' deep (depending on your state) – everyone fought trench shores until they became the "norm", or...habit!
- **Estimating meeting** – have one every Wednesday to keep abreast of opportunities and who on your team is leading the estimate
- **Asset management** – apply QR or bar code labels and enforce Monday by 5 o'clock as the scan-in date to ensure assets survived the weekend
- **Toolbox talks** – make Monday morning at 7:00 am your weekly toolbox safety day

*Scott Jennings, P.E., is the President of SJ Construction Consulting, LLC [[www.sjcivil.com](http://www.sjcivil.com); (808) 271-5150]. He recently owned and operated a heavy/civil construction company and now provides cost estimating, litigation support, and efficiency advice to contractors. He is the founder of Runjob Software, Inc. ([www.runjobsoftware.com](http://www.runjobsoftware.com)).*



- **Cost-to-complete meetings** – make every 25<sup>th</sup> of the month a required sit-down meeting in corporate or over the phone/Skype/Facetime to discuss job cost projections

The goal here is to make your company a 'best in class' company. Once you get these controls in place and working, habit takes over. Executive management no longer has to preach to the mid-managers or the field staff, they're just doing it.



**No rose-colored glasses.** I'm not wearing rose colored glasses here, I get it; these habits may seem unrealistic and naïve on my part.

I do get it. I have been there.

We all know that incentivizing our staff by saying "you don't get your paycheck unless I get your time in by Tuesday morning" often falls on deaf ears. And holding a paycheck has got to be the strongest motivator and even it often doesn't work!

I'm suggesting here that the power of habit can help greatly. You will have to go through the 8 weeks of dysfunction like in my example above, but it will come.

**My story.** It's everything you have read above. I've been able to institute important meetings, like the Estimating Meeting, out of raw force and persistence. They became invaluable meetings.

Find your policy and procedures champion for an estimating meeting or an asset management weekly scanning or a Monday toolbox talk. The incentive is not money, it's the sense of satisfaction the champion will have after having implemented this new habit. Management just needs to stay persistent and supportive during the transition.

Getting more of these controls in place will help get your company to cruise control which is a good thing.