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Focus

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Take Up Homework

I am frequently amazed by the parallels between business and other facets of our lives. Recent events in my professional and family spheres reminded me of a critical requirement for managerial success: Periodically audit activities. In other words, "Take up and check the homework."

The Business Event

A client discovered that a trusted employee was failing to carry out a fundamental activity. This situation had continued for months because the supervisor had not physically inspected the work product. Much time and energy was required to correct the problems uncovered.

The Personal Event

I became complacent in checking my son's progress in a high school typing class, relying on his assertions that his performance was acceptable. Guess what? The school progress report said otherwise. For several weeks thereafter, I was closely involved in helping him catch up. (Showing him email correspondence between me and his teacher aided this process greatly!)

Outcomes

The business adopted better internal controls, and hired a replacement who soon exceeded the previous employee's performance by a wide margin.

The Dad used the coursework catch-up to show his son how seemingly impossible tasks can be accomplished with planning, teamwork, and personal effort.

The Lesson? Adopt the Russian Cold War philosophy "Trust, but verify."

- Periodically review work processes and end products. This should be used as an opportunity to teach, correct recurring deficiencies, and clarify expectations.
- Ask the end-user of the work product for feedback on quality, timeliness, and other factors affecting the value to the customer.
- If serious problems are discovered, use a team to quickly correct shortcomings.
- Proactively seek ways to do things better, faster, and cheaper.

And don't be a lazy father.

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