

## Management and the “Positive Consistency” principle.

By Colm McCormack, January 2009.

### Don't Be Too Quick to Rubbish Consistency

Consistency gets such a bad rap these days. So much of the world is consistently bad, ineffective, inefficient, and more. Consistency just doesn't seem to fit into a world that demands creativity, innovation, flexibility. But it's the human behavioral aspects – the desirable aspects – that managers must focus on here. Consistently reassessing, reflecting, etc, everything we – as managers - do, think, feel, perceive, and more.

If I am consistently crap as a manager, things don't look good. But inconsistency drives others crazy. So I must be consistent in the good behaviors. Those good behaviors – reassessing constantly, changing things, etc – are actually very flexible and usually in flux. But they deliver high quality managerial results. So, my consistent approach delivers consistently high quality through concepts that appear to promote inconsistency. And that's where so much of the world gets it wrong. Don't be too quick to rubbish consistency as some sort of conservative, rigid creature that stunts the development of the human race. The trick in management is to be consistent in demanding high standards, consistent in achieving high quality, and to reach such ends using methods which in themselves are inconsistent (flexibility, reassessment, change, etc).

### Breaking Consistency Into Three Different Parts

Consistently doing the wrong things, behaving in the wrong way, always leading to problems and financial loss is what I have come to term “Negative Consistency”. The opposite, what I term “Positive Consistency”, should therefore be obvious.<sup>1</sup> So we have inconsistency, and then consistency broken into two parts: negative and positive. The trick now is to stay alert and define each activity, behavior, system, methodology, perception, that you come across as either lacking in consistency, or as Positive or Negative Consistency. Doing so enables you to determine which stays and which ought to be reconfigured. This also helps put an end to any argument suggesting that in a world now governed by change consistency is outdated. Only the Negative Consistency aspects are out of place.<sup>2</sup>

### Start Investigating and Asking Questions

As a manager, ask yourself why things are performed the way they are.

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<sup>1</sup> As we will see later, however, a seemingly positively consistent process or system can turn to negative consistency if the process is devoid of context awareness and an ability to reassess constantly. See Chapter 7 of: **Just Manage It! If You Cannot Manage Yourself You Cannot Manage Others** (Book 1 in the “Just Manage It!” series). Further details at: [www.ColmMcCormack.com](http://www.ColmMcCormack.com)

<sup>2</sup> Companies sailing too close to the wind in terms of cash-flow is a practice which – if continued – can be viewed as Negative Consistency.

Observe employees, listen to them. Then ask yourself if what you are seeing is inconsistency, Negative Consistency or Positive Consistency. Are there good reasons for things being the way they are? Is the inconsistency or negative consistency understandable given the circumstances, the rules, the organizational culture, the training manuals, the examples set by more senior personnel within the organization? What must change? How easily can you carry out such changes and what are the benefits for all concerned? List these benefits since people listing the cons due to resistance to change-styled reactions will cause the doom and gloom to appear to outweigh the reasons you *must* change. Listing the benefits enables you to retain a solution-oriented mindset, to frame the conversation in positive terms and to retain focus on what really matters.

### **The Real Starting Point**

As managers, the starting point is with us. Remember what we said in the article on [Management and the "All Blame Migrates" principle](#): very often a manager blaming employees for the way they work and behave can see the blame migrate from the workers to the manager himself. Managers must not only see themselves as part of the solution – they must also consider themselves as potential parts/causes of the problem, even if only unwittingly so.

When I start focusing on my own level and display of consistency, I start to notice it in others. It's just like someone telling you they never see black cars on the streets any more. After

that, all you see are black cars! Watching for a lack of consistency in others can be important. It enables you to regulate your own behavior. It also enables you to get behind the words of employees to the true underlying motivation behind their behavior and attitudes. Finally, observing others - by enabling you to regulate your own behavior – puts you firmly on the road toward managing yourself first before rushing out to manage others.

### **Replace Volatility with Reliability**

Swinging from one extreme to the other – whether because of depression, alcohol, drugs, family difficulties, whatever - without any apparent reason can do a lot of damage. People who are positively consistent in mood and personality add comfort and reassurance to their surroundings. Everyone knows what they are dealing with. If you generally appear calm, knowledgeable, etc, then when disaster strikes, any radical change from that general appearance will cause alarm. You may certainly develop a sense of urgency, strength of opinion, but moving from calm and knowledgeable to panicked, ranting, raving, is too far a leap.

There really is no escaping the Positive Consistency principle when seeking to be an effective manager. Whether it's the way you deal with people, your mood, your reactions to different situations, a lack of Positive Consistency will come back to haunt you. But it's not just behavioral issues. Don't formulate teams but then continue rewarding people for their individual achievements. Don't preach

about cross-selling of services but then focus on billing hours.

A lack of consistency leads to a world of troubles. Remember, others are watching, listening, recounting the tales: bad news spreads out to all employees and stakeholders. Exaggerations and assumptions can make things even worse. It is crucial when dealing with the idea of consistency that the opportunity to set suitable examples is seized upon. If you show others that Positive Consistency is the norm, then such examples will in time spread to others, especially if you are in a senior and visible position.

### **A Failure to Manage Yourself Can Lead to Copycats, Demands, Constraints**

No matter what the excuse (notice I have not said “reason”) when you breach the Positive Consistency principle, not only do you set an unsuitable example for others: you set down a homing beacon for blame to migrate to you at some point in the future.<sup>3</sup> Inconsistency at a high ranking level will see similar poor behavior later from the new would-be managers who are watching the examples set. It really is all you can expect. Such an outcome will see blame migrate from those new ineffective managers to you. We also see this with our children. Set them bad examples and you can only blame yourself for the results. On a more worrying level, research indicates that inconsistent parental responsiveness can lead to attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance issues in later life.

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<sup>3</sup> See article entitled: Management and the “All Blame Migrates” principle at [www.ColmMcCormack.com](http://www.ColmMcCormack.com)

It is also easier to renege on promises to family. In other words, we tend to be inconsistent or negatively consistent on the home front in a number of ways.

I urge Executives, Managers, Team Leaders, Supervisors... to Choose “Positive Consistency” thereby lessening the Demands made of them and weakening the Constraints under which they must meet such demands.<sup>4</sup> Get out of your own way. Put an end to inconsistency and “Negative Consistency” thereby avoiding the fire-fighting and band-aiding style of management that can be so prevalent in organizations today.



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<sup>4</sup> The theory of Demands, Constraints, Choices is attributed to Professor Rosemary Stewart of Templeton College, University of Oxford, U.K.