

The gap between knowing and doing

Everyone comes back in September with good intentions. Mark Topley explains why most don't survive contact with the diary

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Somewhere in the middle of a fortnight off, you had one of those clear-headed moments where you saw exactly what needed to change. Maybe you wrote it down. Maybe it's still in the notes app on your phone, under a shopping list.

Then the work diary reopens, two people are off sick, the compressor plays up, and by the end of week two the list has gone the way of every list before it.

Most owners read that as a discipline problem, but it isn't. You didn't forget, and you didn't lack commitment. What you ran into is the gap between knowing and doing, and it's the single biggest thing holding practices back – bigger than recruitment, bigger than the contract, bigger than most of what we spend our time worrying about.

Booting up

The uncomfortable bit is that almost every practice I work with already knows what to do. They've been on the courses, read the books, sat through the study clubs and nodded along. The knowledge is in the building. What's missing is the installation.

Think about the last training your team invested in. Six weeks on, how much of it had actually changed the way the practice runs? For most, the honest answer sits somewhere between 'almost none' and 'some of it, for a while'.

That's not a reflection on the training, and it's certainly not one on your team. It's what happens to good ideas when nobody deploys them.

'Steady progress will get you further by Christmas than a brilliant fortnight in September followed by silence'

Knowing is cheap. Deploying is the work

An idea is deployed when four things are true.:

1. Someone owns it by name, not by department
2. There's a written standard for what good looks like, so it isn't living in your head
3. It runs on a rhythm – a slot in the huddle, a monthly review, something that means it gets touched without you remembering to touch it
4. There's a date in the diary to check whether it's working.

Four things. Not a transformation programme, not a new manual, not a team away day. Notice what they have in common: they're all structural. None of them rely on anyone trying harder in October than they did in September, which is just as well, because willpower is the least reliable material you can build a practice out of.

In last month's article, I wrote about why delegation disappoints, and this is the same argument just from a different angle. Hand over a task without the authority and it bounces back to you. Learn something without deploying it and it never leaves your head in the first place. Both are failures of structure wearing the costume of a people problem.

Pick one thing – just one

The instinct in September is to fix everything at once, and that instinct is exactly why nothing sticks. Six changes launched in a week is six things half done by half term.

So, pick one. The thing you keep coming back to, the one that would take the most friction out of the week if it were properly running. Give it an owner, write down what good looks like, put it on a rhythm, set a review date for mid-October. Then leave the rest of the list alone until that one is bedded in.

Consistency beats intensity, and steady progress will get you further by Christmas than a brilliant fortnight in September followed by silence.

If you want a straight read on how wide the gap is in your practice, I've built a short scorecard that measures exactly that – 10 questions, about three minutes, and a proper answer on where the drop-off is happening. You'll find it at scorecard.marktopley.co.uk. Then pick your one thing, and hold the line on it.

To get in touch with Mark, visit **marktopley.co.uk**.