Systems Judgement

A session from the Rx CD System

Rx

Systems Judgement:

The ability to be balanced in getting things accomplished within the external system of people and things within which you work; your affinity for schematic thinking.

Why is this skill important?

Just about everyone recognizes that rules are important in our society. They keep systems and businesses running smoothly, and they regulate important interactions among people. Imagine driving if there were no pavement markings, stop lights, or turn signals. Imagine if every state had completely different systems of punishing criminals. Imagine trying to get a tax refund if there were no records kept of how much tax you had paid.

But there are very few completely unbreakable rules. And sometimes, breaking or circumventing the rules is the only way to get something done. Now, I'm certainly not advocating breaking the rules in a way that will hurt someone or cause major problems for your company. I'm not talking about completely ignoring major company policies or disobeying United States laws.

But I am talking about the fact that sometimes, in order to get something important done, you have to recognize that finding a better way to do it is the only way to get it done!

People who have the ideal balance in Systems Judgment are able to achieve a balance between the need to work within a set of guidelines and operating outside of set boundaries in order to accomplish goals. People who are good at Systems Judgment tend to be proactive, as they are able to keep making progress on projects without getting stuck—in other words, they know when need to work "outside the box," and when to "stay in the lines."

People who are less skilled at Systems Judgment may be overly focused on the need for systems and order OR they may under-appreciate the importance of established systems and order. In the former case—people who are attached to requirements for systems—perfectionism and a dogmatic inflexibility as to how things should be done may result (form over function). In the latter case—people who always seek to color outside the lines—individualistic behavior, a tendency to discount the importance of policies and planning, and reactionary behavior may occur.

Your purpose in becoming more skilled at Systems Judgment is to understand that systems are in place for a reason, and that the rules and regulations of everyday life

serve important purposes. BUT, you also must understand that coloring outside the lines, taking advantage of networks of people, and calling in favors are often requirements of being a truly proactive, effective business person.

What are skills associated with Systems Judgment?

Someone who has mastered skills associated with Systems Judgment:

- Cultivates and maintains extensive networks of key individuals.
- Typically follows the rules and plays by the book.
- Recognizes that sometimes acting OUTSIDE of rules and regulations is necessary to achieve key objectives.
- Does not break the rules if it will hurt someone or endanger the company.
- Sees the long-term impact of his or her own actions.
- Chooses battles wisely.

How do you develop your own skills in Systems Judgment?

- Don't adhere to outdated procedures.
- Be flexible about changing systems and priorities.
- Don't micromanage other people—allow them to complete tasks on their own.
- Realize that original thought can solve problems creatively, but constraints can't!
- Don't follow rules or procedures that aren't working! Amend them or find a better way.
- DO use policies or procedures that are mandated by the company—they may be in place for a reason, even if you don't understand it.
- Know who the key decision makers are, and cultivate them as resources.
- Don't insulate yourself at your desk or in your department—network outside!
- Do favors for other people.
- Don't be a perfectionist—make reasonable efforts to ensure quality, but don't obsess about it.
- Develop your skills in planning and making project schedules.
- Use resources diplomatically and effectively.
- Look for patterns in the work you do—seek ways to improve consistent failings and encourage positive traits.
- Don't question every rule or regulation. Only challenge the really important ones that are having a major negative impact on your work. And make sure you have a better suggestion!
- If you don't agree with a policy or procedure, be direct about it and discuss your objections openly with the appropriate people.
- If you've discussed your concerns and are still in disagreement, cede to management or group opinion.
- Follow through on and maintain any policies or systems that YOU initiate.

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Systems Judgment Activities

Activity 1: Analysis

Think about a recent project that the rules or policies wouldn't let you handle the way you wanted to. What rules or policies were in the way? Are the rules in place for a reason? In retrospect, can you see another way around the problem? Who could have helped you? What effect did the rules or policies have on the project? How did you eventually complete it?

Activity 2: Advice

Interview someone you know or work for who seems to always be effective at accomplishing difficult projects. Talk with him or her about rules and how he or she works with them or outside of them. How does he/she decide when to break the rules? How does he/she get around them effectively? Does he/she make rules? What is his/her advice to you?

Activity 3: Looking at Current Processes

Think about the top three most common activities you do in your job.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

For EACH activity, answer the following questions:

1. With whom do you interface in the course of completing the activity?
2. What are the major rules that apply to the process?
3. What are the key forms you must use to complete the process?
4. Whose approval is required to complete the process?
5. What resources are required to do the activity?
6. Are there any industry best practices that haven't been implemented that could help you with this activity?
7. How could you do the process better?

Once you have completed answering those questions, review your answers carefully. Then, work to cultivate the people and other resources whose help you require. See if you can alter or replace rules that are ineffective or unnecessarily slow.

Activity 4: Outside the Box

What does it mean to you to "work outside of the box"? Is it scary? Is it difficult? Can you see outside of the box? What is the worst thing that will happen if you work outside the box? What's the worst thing that will happen if you stay inside the box?

Think about your three favorite professional heroes. Do they color inside the lines? OR, do they "think outside the box"?