



EPICENTRAL

A Newsletter from Epicenter Development Group highlighting ideas that improve organizations

Welcome to Epicenter Development Group's newsletter, EPICentral. The purpose of this newsletter is to highlight fundamental ideas that have helped organizations develop and maintain great manufacturing and service operations. We hope that you find our EPICentral newsletter helpful, and we would welcome your comments on its content.

Business/Home Tool Series: The "Lifestyles" Tool

I've always believed that there is a parallel between running a world-class organization and good parenting skills. Whether you're running Microsoft or a small household, you still need to apply good leadership skills in the areas of communication, teaching/mentoring, planning, and motivating the people within your group. For that reason, this newsletter is about a tool that our family has successfully used at home which, I believe, has uses in the workplace. The tool is called the "Lifestyles System" and is based upon the rules of "natural consequences" and "rewards."

Back when our children were in elementary and middle school, we found ourselves spending increasing amounts of time helping them with their school work. At one point, it started to feel like the grades that they were getting in school were more of a reflection on our level of assistance versus their own effort and abilities. At the same time, we started to have to "police" our children to make sure that they were completing their assignments before they spent time watching television, playing on the computer or hanging out with friends. Overall the system seemed to work, but it took increasing amounts of effort to maintain and sometimes led to resentment and, yes, yelling. This all went away once we implemented the "Lifestyles System."

Creating the "Lifestyles System"

Identify the Results You Want to Improve. To be effective, you must pick a system where your children (or subordinates) have the ability to affect the results. Home examples might include school grades or completing family chores. Business examples might include productivity,

School Rules At the Proctor House

1. Mom and Dad are available as a resource for helping with homework, studying and projects. We always have the right to limit the help, as necessary.
2. You are not allowed to stay up past your bedtime working on homework and projects unless permission by parent.
3. Mom and Dad need to see your interim and final report card scores and any tests or quizzes that you fail ("D" or "F").
4. Mom and Dad won't yell about your grades; you get the lifestyle based on your grade level.

Grade Level	Lifestyle
Straight A's	A- Open television/computer during the week and fun before work allowed. Unlimited after school programs. Bonus: Erin - ? Shannon - ?
A's in all core courses (English, Math, Science, Social Studies). One or two B's in other courses	AB- Television/computer and fun before work during the week with permission. After school programs with permission.
A's and B's in all core courses. One "C" is allowed in other courses	B- Television/computer on weekend only. Fun before work and after school programs with permission.
One or more "C"s in a core course on an interim or final grade. [or] More than one "C" in other courses	C- Television/computer on weekend only. All work complete before fun. No after school programs except academic tutor.
One or more "D" or "F" in an interim or final grade	D- No television or computer. No after school programs except academic tutor.

timeliness or quality of work.

Define the Lifestyle Levels. Each level should be clearly defined by measurable results over a specific period of time. For our children, this involved their interim and letter grades for each quarter of the school year. For an employee, this could include, for example, specific monthly or quarterly targets for productivity, quality and/or timeliness of work.

Define the Lifestyle at Each Level. The Lifestyle is a description of the freedoms, limitations and benefits associated with each level. At home, this might include the right to watch television on a school night or an extended curfew. In business, this might include the flexibility to work from home, flexible work hours or more autonomy in project work.

Identify "Rules" for Using the System. The "Rules" are essentially the ground rules and boundaries for the Lifestyle System that you have developed. The goal of these rules is to clarify how the system will work, general assumptions and exclusions.

Implement. Once a Lifestyles System has been designed, it's time to communicate it to the troops and put it into practice. Recognize that there will be an initial period of time for working out kinks and establishing the general routine.

Considerations:

- The real benefit of this system is that it helps to foster individual responsibility for outcomes and clarifies the benefits and penalties associated with specific levels of performance. After implementing this at home, our children became much more independent with their school work and drove themselves to do their best to maintain an "A" or "AB" Lifestyle (and no more yelling).
- For this tool to work, it absolutely must be followed consistently. Barring unusual circumstances, the rewards, freedoms and responsibilities must be enforced per the Lifestyle attained (no negotiation).
- In order for this tool to be effective, consider that the "Lifestyles" need to be meaningful for your children or subordinates. For children this might mean a later curfew; for employees this might mean flexible working hours or more control over their assignments.
- Recognize that the Lifestyles System may need to be modified at times. Modifications, however, should only be done after serious consideration (usually to enhance or clarify the system).
- Keep It Simple (KISS). As I would always recommend, keep the system as simple as possible to reach the desired results. As home this might mean creating a system that can be easily understood by an eight-year-old with "gold stars" or stickers.
- If you would like more information on how this system has worked at the Proctor house or would like more information on how to use this tool within your organization, please contact us at 216-702-0952.

Next Steps

If you would like more information on this topic or other similar types of tools, please contact Bill Proctor with your request at wproctor@epicentergroup.com or 216-702-0952. You can also find previous issues of EPICentral at [Newsletters](#).

Mr. Proctor also speaks on a variety of problem-solving and system design topics that can help companies significantly increase the success and profitability of their businesses. If you are interested in having Bill speak at one of your upcoming meetings/events or would like more information on any of the speaking topics, please visit [Speaker Services](#) or you can email sales@epicentergroup.com.

Epicenter Development Group is a unique consulting firm that seamlessly integrates the disciplines of Systems Engineering and Organizational Analysis & Development to create practical design solutions to your toughest challenges. It is on the cutting edge of problem-solving solutions and the creator of a unique process called GreenRoom Engineering. This process adds greater value and cost savings for clients as compared to traditional engineering methods.

William Proctor, Epicenter's founder and president, has provided services around the country to more than 100 companies consisting of a variety of organizations; and Epicenter continues to grow as a resource for firms of all sizes.

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