

Greet Every Direct Report, Every Morning
Alan A. Ayers, MBA, MAcc
Content Advisor, Urgent Care Association of America
Associate Editor, *Journal of Urgent Care Medicine*
Vice President, Concentra Urgent Care

The Operations Director overseeing four hospital-affiliated urgent care centers has a mountain of paperwork awaiting her. She arrives early, retreats to her office, shuts her door, and starts tackling her “to do” list.

- *Review overtime report. Check.*
- *Approve paid time off requests. Check.*
- *Resolve client drug screening issue. Check.*
- *Reconcile vendor supply invoices. Check.*

After being “heads down” in her work for several hours, she realizes how quickly the morning has “flown by”—and emerges from her office around 11:30am to be bombarded by her direct reports with a host of issues that require her attention. What she does not realize, however, is that the past productive four hours *for her* have been time spent *in waiting* by her direct reports—who seeing her closed door, didn’t want to interrupt her.

Management experts recommend greeting every direct report every morning. A simple go-around the office to say, “Good morning, how are you today?” “What are your priorities?” and “Is there anything you need from me?” can go a long way towards building camaraderie, increasing accountability, and boosting productivity in workplace teams. Greeting employees sends a message that their manager is interested in them and their work, is approachable, and is trustworthy. For employees in remote locations, the greeting can be accomplished by a quick telephone call “*just checking in—do you need anything from me?*” Depending on the size and complexity of the operation, this *no-cost* activity shouldn’t take more than five or ten minutes of a manager’s time but the benefits are *invaluable*:

- It provides an opportunity for managers to get to know direct reports on a personal level. By asking “how was your weekend,” a manager can begin to learn about the people and hobbies that are important to employees. People by nature are more loyal to those with whom they have affinity—such *humanizes* the manager.
- It provides an opportunity for managers to resolve any bottlenecks or barriers to employees to doing their jobs, resulting in greater productivity. For instance, a manager who learns billing office staff routinely “sits on its hands” awaiting charts to be faxed from the medical centers can identify a process or technology solution to increase efficiency.
- It gives managers insights as to employee activities, their work habits, and their attitudes. A manager who circulates the office can quickly figure out who routinely arrives late or spends the first hours of the day on Facebook, surfing the Internet, or huddled with co-workers in gossip.
- It signals to employees that the manager is approachable, values their contributions, and is available to resolve barriers to the employees’ productivity. It goes beyond saying “I have an open door policy” to provide a consistent opportunity for employees to address their immediate issues.

A manager can talk all day about culture, behaviors, and teamwork but employees will view his actions as his “real values.” A manager who “walks the talk”—whose actions are consistent with his words—endorses his authority, boosts his credibility, and provides a good example to follow. By contrast, a manager who works behind closed doors, comes and goes without any transparency as to his schedule, continually cancels employee one-on-ones, relies heavily on email or text messaging instead of face-to-face communication, and shows no interest in employee’s personal lives—risks not only being disliked as a manager, but ultimately will lose employee’s respect and obedience.

Thus, it should go without saying that a manager who incorporates the “morning walk-around” must be sincere and consistent in doing so, showing genuine interest in employees as he greets them. Sincerity can’t be feigned so the greetings of a manager who abandons the activity after two or three days will be dismissed as “flavor of the day” and employees will view the greeting of a manager who fails to “speak from the heart” as additional evidence the manager is a “big phony.”

To that end, a manager who greets employees must also show equal enthusiasm to avoid reinforcing perceptions of favoritism. For example, a manager who always greets and socializes with Nan but ignores Adam, Karla and Mike—risks not only jeopardizing his own credibility, but can actually damage Nan’s relationship with her co-workers. In extreme cases, the manager’s unequal treatment could be misconstrued as sexual harassment or lead to resentment and animosity of co-workers that hobbles the team.

Last, the attitude and tone of an urgent care operation emanates from the top and manifests in patient encounters. If employees feel valued by a manager who greeted them, remembered and asked about their kids’ big sporting tournament the night before, surprised them by bringing coffee and pastries, and intervened in resolving productivity barriers—employees will show the same behaviors towards patients who will then build the business through repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth. So greeting employees is not only an investment in productivity and retention, it’s also a solid *marketing* investment.