

## THE RULE OF THREE & FOUR

Consider the number of three (3) in our lives! Some are related to math, science, religion, stories, poems, philosophy, astronomy, and art. It includes the Trilogy, triangle, Three Little Pigs, Three Musketeers, Three Bears, the waltz, three wise men with their three gifts, Orion's Belt, past-present-future, the "third eye," yesterday-today-tomorrow, and the past-present-future. How about blood, sweat and tears, and mind, body, and spirit. Then, the infamous sex, drugs, and rock n' roll. The number of three ideas is dominant in prose, poetry, films, novels, and advertising. Oh--Don't forget: Three strikes--and you are out.

The concept of three uses the smallest number (3) that allows recognition of a set pattern. The use of the idea of three is based on the principle that when things come in threes, it provides more humorous, satisfying, or effective outcomes than other numbers. It increases memory, brevity, and rhythm, giving the smallest amount of information to create a pattern. Historically, the "Rule of Three" dates back to ancient Greek rhetoric.

In leadership, employee job information and processes are more likely to be remembered if written in threes. There is a trilogy effect related to successful leadership, and that effect is:

1. **Respond** appropriately to negative & positive behaviors of all employees. That means responding in a supportive way to positive behaviors and correcting negative behaviors. Too often, as leaders, there is a response just to an employee who does NOT do the job! How about the employee who does (or more than does) the job?
2. **Provide** improvement information when behavior is not what is expected or required. And---Tell, demonstrate, and validate what is done correctly, promptly—not just at a pre-determined evaluation time. Provide the "pat on the back" of the employee who does what is expected or required!
3. **Support** positive change when an employee is doing things correctly—or at least to your specification. Then, how about the creative employee who makes a positive difference in your/their work?

It is the trilogy effect that helps to maintain the current organization by curtailing entropy:

1. **Organizational standards** of the business (philosophy, mission statement, purpose, goals, and objectives)
2. **Performance standards/job descriptions**
3. **Effective leadership** to maintain and stabilize the standards

Benjamin Bloom (a famous educator) recommended a trilogy for teaching employees/students and writing job standards/job descriptions:

1. **Cognitive** (intellectual) understanding of the expected performance
2. **Psychomotor** (muscular) movement that accomplishes the required behavior(s) of the performance standard/job description

3. **Affective** expectations (attitudes) regarding the expected work and how to treat customers appropriately.

IT IS "THREE STRIKES, AND YOU ARE IN" (NOT OUT) IF THE LEADER CAN PERFORM CORRECTLY A TRILOGY OF WORK/PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS!

Now we recognize the Rule of Three process. How about the Rule of Four!

The Rule of Four in all work and personal situations is:

1. **Assess** the situation to determine if it meets the goal of the organization or personal need
2. **Plan** to develop, establish, maintain, or improve a negative situation
3. **Implement** the developed plan to retain a positive situation or resolve a negative situation
4. **Evaluate** the situation relative to the plan and repeat this rule of four as needed.

The Rule of Three and the Rule of Four are known as Structure Guides. Structure Guides intend to promote consistent, systematic thinking in our world of many considerations. They minimize confusion in our thinking processes and provide meaning to the logical outcomes of our behaviors and thoughts.

A structure related to thinking helps provide optimum leadership success!

Carolyn Taylor, Ed.D. M.N. R.N.

Leadershippoweronline.com