



**“Whenever you see a flowchart, don’t just look at what’s in the boxes. Ask yourself what the arrows really represent” *Roger Deaner***



## Quality assurance with the stroke of a pen

I guarantee you’ve never heard of [Admiral Human Rickover](#). He was famed in his time (1950s - 1980s) as the ‘father of the nuclear Navy’ and his obsession with quality and safety ensured zero faults in hundreds of nuclear powered vessels for decades.

Rickover noticed in the 1950s that when submarines went into the Navy yards for refits, they came back riddled with faults, which took months, millions of dollars, and often litigation, to rectify. Shoddy workmanship was a systemic problem in contractor companies, whose management was focussed on profitability, not quality. Rickover therefore issued a short, infamous, memo to all refit contractors: “Effective immediately, the senior management of all refit contractors shall accompany the boat on the first test dive after refit”.

The quality culture improved overnight. Test dives went smoothly. Crew morale increased. There was no more tug of war between contractors and captains. Everyone was now playing on the same team.

***Question: In whose interests do you have to make quality (or any other desired attribute) matter?***

---

## The power of the 1%

Tonight I made a prawn pasta dish that my wife said was the best thing I’d ever cooked. I’m always happy with compliments, but honestly, I’m no Masterchef. But, with this dish, I did something I’d never in my life done before.

I have been visiting my elderly mother each week during lockdown to take her food and check she’s OK. She said, months ago, “I feel like prawns. Can you cook some?” So, the next week, I did. And the one after. And the one after that. For 10 weeks, I made the same dish. Never very different, but never the same twice: I experimented with how much oil I used, how hot it was, frying the prawns in garlic first and removing them before adding them back, reducing the tomatoes to different degrees, adding smoked paprika. And, tonight, it was superb.

So, in a world where we seem obsessed by disruptions and breakthroughs, I maintain that our best chance of improvement often comes from doing what we do well, but keep making it better. A 1% improvement daily, after all, will double performance in 70 days. Warren Buffett ascribes his success to the same principle, namely, getting average to good results repeatedly, over a long time, letting compounding do its work.

What’s most important, though, is not the repetition. It’s the insight that accompanies the repeated efforts. I can cook a dish a thousand times, but if I’m not paying attention, learning each time, I won’t improve. If every time I do it, I ask, “Why did that work? What can I change?” I’ll end up somewhere pretty good.

***Question: What can you improve through repetition coupled with insight?***

---

## Context removal

My 11yo son, Jasper, returns to school Monday. He’s had 9 days at school since March, with the rest all home-schooled. Astonishingly, he even said, just before holidays began 3 weeks ago, “I’d rather go back to school than have holidays”. But why?

“He misses his friends” is the simplistic answer. But underneath this is a more complex one. He — and all children, perhaps all adults too — learn socially. In the classroom, Jasper is observing the teacher, watching reactions, sensing shifts in energy and attention, looking over at his friends and gauging their motivation. If he doesn’t understand something, he can look at his neighbours’ work, or ask a friend, if he’s embarrassed to ask his teacher.

I’m hearing the same thing from my clients. Working from home is fine, from a productivity perspective. Accountability is not an issue. Nor is absenteeism, nor inefficiency. What is a problem is context removal. People are missing vital signals transmitted socially. They’re missing the parts of their jobs that are more than just information.

This doesn’t mean that working remotely can’t work. It does. But we need to find ways to create contexts for people — social contexts, in which they can transmit and receive social signals, essential for cohesion and learning.

***Question: What can you do to create context while working remotely?***

---

As always, please send me your feedback by email to [ww@workwell.com.au](mailto:ww@workwell.com.au). What topics or questions would you like me to write about in the future? Let me know!

Have a wonderful weekend, all.

Andrew



[Unsubscribe](#)