All The Important Things Game

This game shines a light into the common, but costly, organizational practice of trying to achieve multiple objectives simultaneously. It exposes the links between competing priorities, unlimited works in progress, unsatisfied customers, and burned out employees.

This game was inspired by, and adapted from, the team at www.Lithespeed.com

Supplies

1 piece of paper for each player
1 marker for each table
Timer

Roles

For each group of 6-10 people, identify the following roles:

Employee: One person in the group is the Employee, they get the marker and are the only person allowed to make name cards

Manager: One person in group is the Manager, they get the timer and are responsible for timing how long it takes the Employee to create each name card. The Manager should record the times for each round.

Customers: Everyone else is a Customer. Customers should tear their paper into three pieces.

Round 1: The Shout

Goal:
- The Employee must make an individual name card for each Customer (variations can include first name only, first/last, a nickname, etc).
- The Customer whose name is written first on the name card "wins"
- The Manager keeps track of how much time it takes the Employee to write each name

Begin: Customers shout their names to the Employee, who starts writing each name down, one per card.

End: The round ends when all name cards have been created. Note the best and worst times.

Debrief
- What was the level of chaos? (How similar is this to the way prioritization often happens at companies? The loudest, most persistent people, usually get what they want first)
- How did the Employee feel? (stressed? frustrated?)
- What were the best and worst times? (Pick one or two teams to be the benchmark, write their times in a visible spot)

Round 2: Everyone's Happy?

Goal: The goal remains the same for the Employee, Customer, and Manager

Begin: The last round was chaotic. As the leader (game facilitator) announce that there have been some process improvement activities. The new company process is that the Employee will write each person's name one letter at a time in round robin fashion.
- Example: If Ann, Sam, and Mary are on the team, the Employee would write "A" on one sheet of paper, then "S" on the next paper, and "M" on the last. The Employee circles back around with the next letter until all names are complete.
- The Manager times how long it takes to write each name.

End: The round ends when every name card is complete.

Debrief

- What were the differences between Round 1 and 2? (Orderly, but inefficient)
- What kinds of waste were happening? (Many kinds of waste, but context and task switching were likely the biggest waste)
- How did Customers feel? Were they happier?
- How did the times compare?
- How did the Employees feel? (Likely frustrating for different reasons, lots of effort-but little work getting done)

Round 3: Focus

Goal: The goal remains the same for the Employee, Customer, and Manager

Add: A WIP limit of 1 + Transparent Priorities

Begin: The Employee chooses the order of Customers to service and can write each Customer's name completely before moving on to the next card. The Manager keeps time in the same way.

End: The round ends when every name card is complete.

Debrief

- How did the Customers feel this round? (Was there pressure to fight for the top spot? Did you have a clear sense of when your card would be done?)
- What else was different in this round?
- How did the Employees feel? (Usually this round is best controlled and least stressful)
- What were the times? How did the best and worst times compare? (Usually less variability between times and this round's times are always at least half as long as either of the previous rounds)