

Mediocrates: The Philosopher of Good Enough

I received an image of Mediocrates, with the caption “Ehh, Good Enough.” I do not think Mediocrates was an actual person, but I believe the philosophy of “Good Enough” has plenty of adherents in the world. When you think about your Control Room Management (CRM) program or other programs, are you seeking excellence or is mediocrity satisfactory? We have seen plenty of programs where “good enough” seemed to be the goal. I get it, there are competing priorities and CRM is just one of many management challenges. As long as you can pass an audit, that will be good enough for some of you. But is that really good enough?

Years ago, I wrote a book Meeting the Challenge of Excellence, which was used for coaching teams about operational excellence. It had a quote from Emmylou Harris: *Mediocrity is going to kill the world before Armageddon ever gets a chance.* What are our standards for avoiding mediocrity and achieving excellence in control rooms and other workplaces? We notice that companies may have standards, but those standards do not always reach the frontlines. It appears to be good enough to have words on a website or in a poster on the wall. But is that really good enough? Do we want to kill the world?

One client asked us to work with the control room to develop a standard that included an emphasis on control room excellence for the controllers and control room managers. They wanted more than just good enough. The development of a standard is a starting point. Excellence requires an ongoing emphasis on knowledge of the required behaviors, observations, assessments and coaching for all of the team members. We can move from good enough to control room excellence and individual excellence.

Individuals need to determine a worthy, challenging target. As the Burmese proverb says, “The person who aims at excellence will be above mediocrity; he who aims at mediocrity will be far short of it.” The list below provides a starting point for individuals:

- Make a commitment to everyday excellence
- Do your best every day and seek to get better
- Be passionate and enthusiastic about life and work
- Know your business and know what it takes to excel
- Act intelligently
- Be reliable and responsible
- Work smart whether you are working alone or with others
- Take care of the little things while remembering the big things
- Practice daily integrity for long-term excellence

Aristotle was an actual philosopher who taught the concept of “arete,” which is a word for personal excellence. It denotes goodness and virtue, and certainly surpasses the “good enough” philosophy of Mediocrates. Let’s apply “arete” to Control Room Management. It is having an excellent plan and doing the correct practices day in, day out, shift after shift. It is applying what Aristotle said, “Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.” Don’t be good enough, do what it takes to be excellent and develop excellent habits!