CHAPTER 5

HABIT # 4—CONTINUALLY MONITOR PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE PLAN

“The last ten percent of performance generates one-third of the cost and two-thirds of the problems.”
—Augustine’s Laws (no. XV), Norm Augustine, CEO Lockheed Martin

Successful project teams understand their progress or lack of it from the start because they have installed both a plan and a monitoring system that measures their progress against the plan. They are able to avoid guessing about their rate of progress. Guessing optimistically is always less embarrassing and less painful—until about the 90-percent point when all that optimism is finally exposed as unfounded. Tracking progress from the start is less painful. Norm Augustine’s words also ring true because many projects begin with huge challenges about which the project team and organization are in denial.
Peter Drucker distinguished between “control” and “controls,” arguing that “control” is proactive and concerned with what ought to be; whereas “controls” are reactive in that they provide feedback about past activity. According to Drucker, the manager exerts control by providing direction and the appropriate guidance, incentives, and resources to enable the direction to be carried out. The manager also establishes a system of controls to determine whether progress is being made in the desired direction and whether the guidance, incentives, and resources are having the desired effect. The effective manager both sets direction (exerts control) and monitors the performance of (controls) the organization.²

Many textbooks also address the command and control concept, or to use Drucker’s terminology, the “control and controls concept”, asserting that the four management functions are to plan, organize, lead, and control (POLC). The reader who is not familiar with the POLC model should refer to one of the many excellent management books that discuss it. Peter Drucker’s Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices (1973) is a fine choice, although it predates the use of the specific POLC vernacular. Management by Robbins and Coulter specifically addresses the POLC model.³ Both planning and leading are acts of setting direction, although for Robbins and Coulter, control is the monitoring and course-correction activity, the opposite of how Drucker uses the term. In the military vernacular, leading is the counterpart to command; however, control has the same meaning in both the traditional management vernacular and the military vernacular. No matter what terminology is used, it is generally agreed that both commanding and controlling are essential management activities, including project management.

This chapter focuses on the feedback and monitoring system that informs the manager about progress, a system that is especially important for effective project