

The Traffic Light Check-In™

This is a high-impact, easy-to-use tool to check in on levels of employee engagement when you are rounding with your team. It also allows you to gather real-time data and spot trends with respect to how engaged employees are. Read through this overview and figure out how to make it your own. This process needs to be comfortable and authentic, so adjust it to match your style.

- ◆ Announce in a team meeting that you will be asking employees to let you know how satisfied, energized and productive they are as you make your rounds. Explain that you will be using a traffic light as a metaphor. Describe the three levels of engagement using the colors red, yellow and green:
 - Red: not satisfied, energized and productive (feeling stuck in Professional Prison)
 - Yellow: somewhat satisfied, energized and productive (out on Professional Parole)
 - Green: very satisfied, energized and productive (enjoying Professional Paradise!)

- ◆ The next time you're going to do rounding, get in the right frame of mind before you leave your office. Your job during rounding is to listen and learn. Avoid becoming rushed, defensive or frustrated.

- ◆ When visiting staff, tell them you're there for a "Traffic Light Check-In" and ask what color best reflects how satisfied, energized and productive they are feeling today. Be sure to follow up with questions that reinforce the idea that they are responsible for their own engagement.
 - "I'm here for the Traffic Light Check-In – are you having a red, yellow or green day?"
 - Follow with, "What are you doing to get to green?" (This question promotes personal responsibility for engagement.)
 - "How can I support you?" (This shows your interest as a leader and coach.)

Listen thoughtfully. Don't worry about solving all of the problems and challenges right there on the spot. Oftentimes, team members simply want to be heard and they know that you can't make everything perfect. If you can't do anything at all about an issue, explain why and brainstorm creative ways to get around the roadblock (we will focus on this in the next Shortcut). For more complex issues that you need to be involved in fixing, make a note to follow up and ask the team member their ideas for improvement.

To add a measurement component, simply keep track of raw data and root causes while you do your rounding. Informal tracking works fine, such as hash marks on a piece of paper for each person in the red, yellow and green zones. If people report being in the green or red zones, ask why and write that down as well. This allows you to track root causes for both high and low engagement and helps you identify what is working as well as what isn't. (Read more about measurement in Shortcut #6.)