

USING MANAGEMENT BY WALKING AROUND IN THE AGE OF AI

“Management by Walking Around” (MBWA) was popularized around the world in 1982 by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman in their bestselling book, *In Search of Excellence*. At the time, the concept shifted management culture away from desk-bound supervision toward visible and approachable leadership. In the age of AI, MBWA still works by relying upon a combination of virtual presence, AI-augmented insights, and purposeful human interactions. MBWA remains valid because it helps build trust, spots problems early, and validates the employee experience as it did decades ago.

1. Virtual Wandering

Today’s team members are often disbursed, so managers must wander virtually some of the time.

- **Asynchronous Touchpoints:** Sending short text or video snippets using tools like Slack or Microsoft Teams or emailing digital “bravo cards” just to say things like, “Saw your presentation yesterday, great job!”
- **Digital Open Door:** Hosting unscripted “office hours” via Zoom or Microsoft Teams where employees can stop by individually or in groups to chat.
- **Dropping Into Collaboration Channels:** Briefly jumping into digital workspaces to listen, gather unfiltered feedback, and gauge team needs.

2. AI-Assisted Engagement

AI tools handle data analytics so managers can focus entirely on strengthening human connections.

- **Support Signals:** Instead of randomly guessing whom to check on, managers use real-time data dashboards that flag changes in digital collaboration patterns.
- **Burnout Prevention:** The “walk” is directed toward operations where AI highlights performance issues, allowing the manager to step in, address needs, and safeguard employee well-being.
- **Outcomes Focus:** Conversations shift from how tasks are being done toward how the employee feels about their goals, using human connections to uncover hidden challenges and capitalize on hidden strengths.

3. On-Site Walkaround Days

When team members are physically together, such as days designated “anchor days” by their organization, walking around becomes a premium opportunity for a manager.

- **Uncluttered:** Managers set aside time blocks to keep walkaround days uncluttered by routine tasks and to prioritize in-person visibility.
- **Unscripted:** Managers avoid policy-driven “walking the floor” in favor of authentic opportunities for spontaneous interactions.
- **Customer-focused:** Managers walk around the organization’s facilities and test the organization’s engagement portals to appreciate the experiences of both customers and employees.



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