

Better Management Via Understanding People

Understanding people is crucial to business success because the human factor plays a central role in how every company performs. There are so many critical business moments that come down to a set of independent variables and how a particular person performs in a specific situation. Companies try to offset this unpredictable factor through training and a series of rewards and punishments to control compliance. While overall this works for most employees, every company struggles with violations and breakdowns in human competence. Tudog believes that the better we understand people, the more likely we are to construct a system that maximizes the potential of our human resources, while diminishing the occurrences of non-compliance and willful disregard.

Sometimes dealing with your people is seen as a distraction from the more pressing business demands of meeting customer needs, competing with well positioned competitors, and managing cash flow. It is easy to take the attitude that these people are being paid to do a job and their feelings need not become a management issue, diverting critical attention from the very activities that make sure there is enough money to pay their salaries.

If only we were mere humans weren't as fragile as we really are. We have emotions, ego, and a whole slew of social matters that basically require management when we come together in a corporate environment. Add to that the competitive impulses, jealousies, romance, and all the other potential dynamics and you come to realize that if you do not manage your staff, you risk the consequences of dissatisfaction and anger.

Neutralizing the risks associated with poor human performance – beyond what training can provide – comes from an understanding of people and how managers can gain the respect, confidence, and loyalty of their employees so that they will want to perform well to please and support their leader. In many ways the root to good relations comes from a number of simple habits managers can adopt that show their employees a genuine concern for them and their wellbeing. Naturally good communication skills make for a good manager, but the communications need to revolve not only around work related mandates, but also demonstrations of acknowledgement and concern. For example, inquiring about the health of a child after an employee left the office the day prior to pick the sick child up from school, or asking people how their weekend was on a Monday morning (and waiting and listening to the answer), show people that you see them as more than functionaries who assist you (are used by you) in reaching a work related objective, the concern for which may or may not be shared by them.

Another behavior you can control and that will have a dramatic affect on your operations is the availability and openness you have with your employees. If you are unavailable or make it be known that you do not wish to be disturbed, the chances are your employees will leave you alone. This may sound good initially, but soon you will find that you are in the dark with regard to problems, not being asked for clarification when they don't understand instructions (leaving work undone or perhaps done improperly), and most of all your employees will feel neglected. Without their sense of your support, their loyalty to you will dwindle, and when you need them to come through with a great effort, their enthusiasm and team spirit may be a bit lower than you hoped.

Motivating your staff is not a short term objective. Every manager needs a sustainable approach to keeping his/her staff enthusiastic and committed. Herein lays the

complications. Our instincts would tell us that if we pay our workers fair wages, and we provide good working conditions, we will have happy employees. Our instincts would be wrong.

The reality is that once the salary level has been established as fair and the work environment has reach a satisfactory level, the employees start looking for the “inner satisfaction” that makes being at work not a function of economic survival, but rather a fulfilling endeavor.

Leading psychologist suggest that this fulfillment comes from the satisfaction of 4 basic needs. They are:

1. **Achievement** – people need to feel like they are getting the job done. It makes them feel accomplished and useful and gives them the sense that there is an end that can be marked, before a new task marks a new start. The manager can understand this very human need and construct the tasks and operational targets to provide the team with a sense of achievement. By providing a series of targets the team gets to meet the objectives along the way, getting the sense of progress and the satisfaction of completing each phase. When constructing the phases you need to be certain not to make them difficult to the point where failure is possible, nor easy to the point where no sense of achievement is possible. The balance is in the task, and the sense of achievement is in the completion.

2. **Recognition** – the completion of the task won't (and can't) be felt without the manager stepping in and acknowledging the successful conclusion and the job well done. This is an excellent opportunity for the manager to highlight specific achievements and give his/her team the praise and respect they seek. The manager's role in recognition is absolute, because only recognition from the manager can provide the employee with the satisfaction he/she wants to receive for the work performed.

3. **Responsibility** – while there are certainly some employees that seek to avoid responsibility, many others view it as an indication of approval and respect, and therefore they welcome it. The manager has the ability to assign and distribute responsibility for every project and should attempt to do so in a manner that limits internal conflict and avoids the creation of a competitive environment. By adding responsibility to an employee's role the manager indicates confidence and respect, and gives the employee the opportunity (and motivation) to demonstrate worthiness.

4. **Advancement** – employees often view advancement in two ways. The first, by increases in salary and promotions, is a structured advancement that comes with annual reviews. The second type of advancement comes with the opportunity to gain new skills or broaden experience. These advances are functions of operational necessity, task completion, and the strengths of the employee.

The ways you interact with your employees with have a profound effect on how they perform. Communicating with your employees serves to keep them positive and dedicated. As a manager you can reinforce good behavior through praise, adjust unacceptable behavior through constructive instruction, and motivate through the articulation of a series of obtainable goals.

Understanding people as a path toward better management is really just a question of recognizing the human dynamics in your organization and working toward making certain that an appropriate level of contentment prevails. Not only is this the way to have satisfied employees, it is the way to run a good business.

© The Tudog Group 1999-2009 All Rights Reserved. Reprint with Written Permission Only