

Managing Productivity, Profitability, Customer Satisfaction Ratings and Employee Turnover - All At Once.

(Main article for Sept 07 "Tips For Today's Managers")

by Larry Johnson

In the July issue of Tips For Today's Managers, I mentioned a study by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman that was published in their book, "First Break All The Rules: What The World's Greatest Managers Do Differently." In the study, they identified 12 critical perceptions that employees have of their jobs and the statistically significant impact these perceptions have on their teams' levels of profitability, productivity, customer satisfaction ratings, and employee turnover rates. In that issue, I commented on two of these perceptions:

- o "My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person." (Number five on the list.)

- o "At work, my opinions seem to count." (Number seven on the list.)

Since then, I've been asked by several readers to comment on the other ten factors, and how supervisors can apply them to better manage their people.

Coffman and Buckingham found that there was a definite rank order to the twelve, so beginning with this issue, I'll start with number 12 and work my way up to number one, David Letterman style, over the next few issues.

#12 - "In this last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow."

The lay-offs of the early 1990's taught us that there is no such thing as a "job for life." Globalization of the manufacturing and the service sectors have driven many jobs traditionally held by Americans overseas. Back in 1987, Tom Peters, in his remarkable book *Thriving On Chaos*, predicted that the worker of the 21st Century will be more like an independent contractor than an employee. She will need to continually acquire new skills and abilities to add value to the organization if she wants to ensure demand for her services. Twenty years later, we see that Peters was right. Adding skills, and having rich learning experiences have become paramount in keeping oneself employable. Seniority and your good looks just don't cut it any more.

Consequently, workers, especially those of the Gen X* and New Millennium age groups,* are very interested in adding to their skill sets. It's no longer a nicety, it's a highly valued job benefit that rivals health care and a good salary.

So What? Consider these questions:

- o Are you making sure the people working for you get opportunities to grow?
- o Are you offering programs to assist them in acquiring more education?
- o Do you think about the growth potential of assignments you give to them?
- o Do you and your organization have an active training and development program for them?

#11 "In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress."

In other words, am I getting feedback on how I'm doing? Feedback not only helps people improve their performance, it can be very motivating if delivered in a non-threatening, coaching manner. Think of the person who loves to play golf. If his average score is 85, that means (for those of you who do not play) that in a four hour round of golf, he swings at the ball 85 times and watches it go somewhere. As a result of watching each shot, he adjusts his swing to improve or repeat the performance of the shot he just made. At the end of the morning, he's received 85 pieces of feedback - plus what he gets from his golfing buddies. And, good or bad, he loves it. No one pays him to do it. In fact, he pays for the privilege. Then he goes to work, where he gets feedback once a year at his annual performance review, whether he needs it or not. And we wonder why he'd rather play golf than go to work.

So What?

How you give people feedback makes a difference. Remember, the feedback our golfer gets is non-judgmental. It is simply a report on his performance. He has to figure out how to use that feedback to get better. Or, if he's with a golf instructor, he understands that it's the coach's job to give him suggestions for improvement

that he can combine with the feedback he observes with each shot.

Likewise, managers, when they give feedback, they are in the role of the golf instructor. It's the manager's job to provide the results of performance on the job and offer suggestions for improvement.

But it can be tricky. Egos are involved so you have to be careful.

Here are some guidelines for giving corrective feedback that will lower the odds of defensiveness and raise the odds the feedback will be heeded:

1. Pick the right time. The purpose of giving corrective feedback is to facilitate learning. When someone makes a mistake, it is tempting to jump right in and “chew her or him out.” This is probably the worst time to let the person know that you don't go along with what he or she just did. Emotions can hinder the learning process, especially if one or both of you are upset. Try holding your feedback until a teachable moment.
2. Make sure the purpose of your feedback is to coach rather than punish. Your emotional state can hinder the delivery of helpful information. Take some time to cool off and examine your reasons for giving the feedback and the outcome you would like to achieve.
3. Select a private place. Nobody likes to receive criticism in public. The chances of defensive behavior soar when negative information is given in front of peers, regardless of your intentions.
4. Be specific. An example or story where you made the same mistake or had the same problem can diminish the accusatory nature of the feedback.
5. Make the feedback descriptive and prescriptive. Stay away from accusations, blame, and threats.
6. Be sure that the feedback is targeted toward something the person can actually change. Describe:

- o Behavior

- o Standards

- o Events
- o Advantages
- o Procedures
- o Expectations

7. Focus on the present and the future. Use the past for supporting data but be aware that when you discuss issues that need correction in the past tense, there is nothing the person can do to change what they've done. Only the present and the future can be changed. So in addition to saying, "You didn't complete all your assignments on time," move the conversation into the present and future by saying, "In the future, I'd need you to complete all assignments on time."

8. Get to the point. Don't hem and haw or describe the issue in vague terms.

9. Recognize and reward improvement carefully (don't embarrass the employee in front of others by complimenting him for finally doing something he should have been doing all along. The improvement may deserve a compliment, but not in public.)

Next month we'll look at a few more of these powerful perceptions and how you can manage them more effectively.

* According to generation expert, Meagan Johnson, the Gen X age group was born between 1965 and 1980, and the New Millennium Generation was born between 1981 and 1990.

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