

MANAGING PEOPLE IS AN ART, NOT A SCIENCE

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All business firms achieve their results through the actions and efforts of other people. Even the one-man operation depends on effective cooperation of his suppliers and on the approving actions of his customers if he is to remain in business. Thus, the greenhouse manager must deal knowledgeably and effectively with people if he is to successfully achieve his goals. People are his most important resource, not the plants. It is primarily through the

greenhouse employees that the image of the firm is transferred to its customers. If this image is to be an accurate representation of the firm's goals, policies and procedures, these must be communicated to the employees.

Those in the sales area would like to have large quantities of a wide variety of plants to sell. Further, they would like these products to be priced low enough to make their job easier. Production employees want their job simplified by producing only a few varieties that could be sold at a price sufficiently high to reward them for their efforts. The greenhouse manager tries to maintain balance between these extremes. In other words, the manager attempts to provide a sufficient quantity and variety of plants to meet his market demand and to price these plants so that there is sufficient margin to cover his costs of operation and return reasonable profit to the firm. This means that the manager must define his market—his clientele—and gear his operation to meet the needs of this market. If he is to be successful, these factors must be communicated to his employees.

Communication has been called the "XX factor" in management. The manager may spend up to 90% of the time talking, listening, writing and reading to gather in and to pass along ideas and information. The more effective his communications, the easier the tasks of supervising become. Effective communication is saying what you mean so that there will be a transfer of understanding. Effective communications invites response. If a message is unclear, the employee feels free to request information needed to clear up the message. Thus, effective communication requires a two-way channel.

Any message sent out will be interpreted by the receiver—a unique human being, different from all other persons. Meanings given to messages will also be affected by outside sources. These can include such things as who the message is from, relations with co-workers, time the message is delivered, and many other factors. Few if any messages will be interpreted exactly as intended.

The unique characteristics each of us possess as an individual affect how we interpret messages and form barriers to clear, effective idea exchange. The same factors that affect how a received message should be interpreted also affect how messages are prepared for sending and the way they're sent. A second barrier to effective communication develops when facts are confused with inferences,

opinions or value judgments.

A third roadblock to effective communication is "gobbledygook." This is the habit of using too many words or fancy words for the message to be understood. Using simple, direct statements to get the message across is important, yet so difficult to do. This is especially true for many of us when we sit down to write. A fourth roadblock to understanding may come from guilt by association. One shared characteristic or bad experience is sometimes used as evidence that the whole lot is bad.

Overcoming these and other roadblocks is the name of the game. Supervisors are in daily give-and-take communications with assistants, workers and customers. If a message is worth saying, it's usually worth planning; a warning to be given is "engage brain before running mouth." Communication guidelines include: (1) know what you are really trying to say; (2) know who you are trying to reach; (3) know yourself; (4) plan the approach, i.e., timing, location, style, clarity, etc.; (5) follow up on the message; and (6) listen for feedback from this and prior communications and adjust accordingly.

Management of people is an art, not a science. Effective management, which implies the ability to produce the desired end product or service efficiently and economically, is a finely tuned art. Thus, there is no one formula or set of rules that say "follow these steps and you will become an effective manager." However, research into "what makes people tick" has provided some understanding of the management process, along with several theories about the various styles of management and the most likely responses of employees to these styles. These guides or food for thought may help to refine and improve the art of management.

It is only by obtaining accurate readings of one's behavior that it can be changed correctly to be effective in managing others. What kind of manager are you? Authoritative? Manipulative? Participative? Wishy-washy? Regardless of management style, or personal blend of styles, most of the work gets done by other people. Effective managers understand themselves and their basic style of management; they seek to know and understand their employees. This knowledge will help them communicate ideas and information more effectively with customers, workers, suppliers, and the general public. The manager needs to be "tuned in" to his employees, to understand and know them as people, not just employees.

Do you employ labor or employees? Is there a difference in how you think about, look at, and act toward existing or potential employees of your firm? Is there a difference between labor and employee—or is it just semantics? There is a difference. It is a matter of *attitude*—your attitude and, from that, their attitude. How you look at it is important because it colors your words and your actions. To think "labor" tends to be impersonal, as if people were all the same, and carries an overtone of superiority. To think "employee" tends to be more personal, perhaps recognizing that people are different in many respects, and tends to convey a more equal attitude. The impression you create, and leave, is important. *You're*

in a seller's market for labor most of the time. People don't have to work for you! They have alternatives, and you have competition for good employees.

Is there a difference between "labor" and "employee"? It is a matter of fact! Employees offer to supply their labor, skills and knowledge to you, in return for something they want. What is it they want? Surprisingly, perhaps money may not be at the top of the list. It is important and necessary, but it is not sufficient to attract and keep a good employee. All people are not created equal—in terms of their background, experience, energy, physical ability, interest, intellect, capability, desire, motivation or the level of their needs and wants. Furthermore, these things are not static, but grow over time as conditions permit. *Each person is a unique entity* with his or her own bundle of abilities, needs and wants. Your job, as employer, is to find out what the prospective employee wants and try to match these wants with what you are prepared to offer. Try to find square pegs to fit into square holes, or round pegs for round holes if you prefer.

There are different kinds of employees. Some might be categorized as:

A) Hard Core Unemployed —people without goals or ambition. They will not work hard and generally have no interest in the job. They shrink from accepting responsibility, and are often absent from the job. Some would say they are lazy and unmotivated, or perhaps they may be able to receive more unemployment compensation than their work contribution is worth.

B) Job Jumper —hard workers if you could keep them on the job. They may be dependable, skilled and fast learners, but may be im-

patient and have hot tempers. These tempers cause problems at home and on the job. It would be hard to meet their social and family goals. Perhaps they are looking for instant gratification. Or perhaps they don't know what they want, and keep going from job to job out of frustration.

C) Eager Beavers —they tend to know all the answers. They are often skilled, well educated and tend to have the "who me?" attitude. Problems are never their fault. They tend to get on people's nerves, and have a tendency to cheat if the opportunity presents itself. For these reasons they tend to be loners, and do not get along with others.

D) The Plugger —responsible, hard working types who are dependable if nothing else. They may well be ideal employees in many situations. Properly instructed and supervised, they will work along and not cause any problems.

E) The Real McCoy —they may be very ambitious, and would like to take over your job. They want to acquire equity to get into business on their own. They want a hand in managing the business, and will quit if not given the opportunity to grow. They can be very productive—maybe even like you?

Obviously, no one is a pure type, but a curious mixture of several employee types. Selecting the right type employee for the work you want done is an important management responsibility. Recognizing employment mistakes and taking corrective action is also an important function that will benefit both parties, creating a "win-win" situation.

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