

Be the Kind of Manager You'd Like to Become

05/01/06

I want to learn about how to be a better manager of people. I have a technical background, and have not had any formal training in managing people. Sometimes I get frustrated and let my feelings show, or I get carried away and share more than I think I should with my employees. How do I do a better job of making connections to my employees, earning their respect and trust? As my company grows, so does my employee count, so I know this will just get to be a bigger and bigger problem in the future.

It's smart of this owner to recognize a limitation and ask for help fixing it. Managing people is a learned skill. Techniques combined with practice can result in significant improvements in overall business results. Ignoring the problem could result in severely limiting the potential of the company. So, hats off to this owner for taking the problem head on, and focusing on a very important area of improvement. Let's talk about management techniques, relationships between people, and the value of looking at where we're coming from personally.

Be the kind of manager you'd like to become. Find role models, other business owners / managers you respect. Spend time with those people, watching how they function. Watch how they handle both employee reprimands and recognition opportunities. Ask them how they

figure out if they need to hire someone, or expand an existing employee's role. Pick your role model carefully, by looking for someone who has done a good job of building a profitable, steadily growing business.

We know this owner is personally accountable, and focused, determined to do a good job with every assignment he takes on. That is the model he wants to have for all employees. One thing this owner, like all owners, must watch for, is to balance personal accountability with delegation and reliance on others.

Determination to go a good job is a benchmark this owner wants to set for all employees. Sometimes there are concerns that some employees are not holding up their end of the bargain. Then you must figure out if the downfall is due to lack of understanding as to what constitutes a "good job". Or, if you find that the employee is willing to accept less than excellent work, you have to take action to correct that, and quickly. As owners, the business gets easier to run when the people around us are as determined as we are to do good work and move the company forward.

One business owner recently noted that he has an employee who constantly makes errors. When he pointed this out, and discussed it with the employee, the employee admitted the fault, and even offered to resign on the

spot. Unfortunately, for this owner, the problem is not so clear cut, as he admits the employee does bring a lot of value to the organization.

After discussing the situation, we decided to have a conversation with the employee about what might be causing the problems. The employee suggested that it might come from a number of causes, including multi-tasking,, a lack of familiarity with numbers, and poor proof reading skills. We decided to watch the employee's progress for 30 days, to try and figure out how to change what's going on. Our major concern is that the organization is only as strong as its' weakest link. In this case we are concerned that the weakness in this link could cause problems throughout the organization, especially during high volume and high stress periods.

When it comes to defining the proper balance to strike in a business environment, I think it was best summed up by a job candidate I recently interviewed. I asked her: what was a lesson she had learned from a mistake she had made. She immediately replied, keep the business environment businesslike.

I asked her to describe the mistake, and she said she had picked up the slack for an employee who needed time off to take care of personal issues. After doing everything she could

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to help that employee for about 3 months, she felt stabbed in the back when the employee proceeded to resign. Looking back, she realized that the employee was sending out signals, right from the beginning, that things weren't going well. If she hadn't tried so hard to see the employee's personal problems, but looked at it as work to get done, she would have seen much earlier that the employee wasn't really trying to make things work.

How many of us, as small business owners, get deeply involved in the lives of our employees – the good, and the bad. We get to know about our employees' families, personal challenges, and come to think of our workers as belonging to something like an extended family. We take it to heart when they have problems, and sometimes forget that we are employers, not relatives.

Our job as employers is to set a standard, and ask employees to uphold that standard. Our job is not to solve employees' personal problems. It is to insure that the company is healthy because everyone within the company respects and supports the organization, and is committed to getting their job done to the best of their ability.

Each of us is the sum of our experiences, from how we were raised, to what happened this

morning as we headed out the door to go to work. Some people had the benefit of a strong, positive foundation growing up, where they were taught to believe in themselves, and encouraged to pursue their potential. Other people had to find their own way, through individual experiences. Regardless of how you were raised, it is important to reflect on who you are, based upon where you have come from.

Take a look at specific situations you have been in, both positive and negative. Look at how you have reacted to the people around you. Look at how the situation unfolded, and thing about the amount of responsibility placed on your shoulders. Ask yourself questions: What did I like about how I handled myself? What did I wish I could have gone back and re-done?

Look at situations you've been in, in which people have rubbed you the wrong way, and situations where you've felt immediately comfortable. What was different about each situation overall? What was different about the people you were interacting with? Were you in familiar surroundings, doing things you were comfortable doing, or were you being challenged to stretch beyond your comfort zone? Were the people like you or different from you? Were you comfortable or uncomfortable because you held similar or different values, information, goals? What kind of

difference did it make that you had a similar or different educational background.

Answers to questions like these may help you to understand triggers, things that set you off, or make you comfortable. Once you understand what triggers reactions for you, you'll be in a better condition to manage your reactions. You can potentially change the outcome of a given situation because you have better insight to how you might instinctively respond, and how you can quickly intervene to alter that response,

Take a look at how you respond to situations. Do you start to sweat under pressure? Do your eyes tear up? Do you start playing with your hands and fidgeting? Don't worry, you're not alone. Everyone has nervous habits and bodily responses. What you want to do is learn how to control your responses, either by changing what you perceive about the situation, or by learning how to walk away and give yourself time to compose.

As you go through your day, be aware that you are constantly shifting, as you move from interacting with one person or group of people, to another. Even within a single group, there are many personalities and moods to deal with. Body movement is an indicator of how the person across from you is taking the information being conveyed.



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Earlier we discussed focusing on how you are responding to situations and people around you, now try to reverse and observe how others are responding. Are they talkative, quiet, tense, happy, thoughtful, or jumping up and down with energy? Are you getting the response from them that you want? Can you alter how they respond, by altering your approach?

If you're looking for more insight on how to adjust your style, consider talking to a mentor or coach. Write out a list of things you want to have happen, and things you want to avoid. This can help clear your mind so you can be more productive. You might ask an employee to do the same. If you are feeling angry, challenged or frustrated, try to go to the source, to figure out how to change the situation. Sometimes, it just helps to have a distraction. Close your door and take a 5 minute break. Go for a quick walk around the block. Set aside the task or project that's stalled, and pick up something else to work on for a short while. All of these coping techniques have worked for many people, figure out which ones work best for you.

Looking for a good book? Try *Breaking the Rules, Removing Obstacles to Effortless Performance*, by Kurt Wright.

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