

Employment

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Motivation and solving office conflicts

THE CONSCIENTIOUS and well-meaning owner of a small business cannot seem to get his workforce motivated, despite a good benefits package and pleasant working environment. "I am coming to the conclusion that it doesn't pay to be nice to people," he says. "Maybe if I fired a few of them I'd get better results!"

The supervisor of a 100-employee division of a large company says his employees are demoralized; he wants to know ways to increase their motivation.

An office manager is stumped to find out that two of her best employees told another supervisor she did not like them. "They are both top performers, and I can never remember being dissatisfied with them in any way!" she says. "What's happening?"

These managers are discovering that managing means managing people. In the course of consulting and column writing I have found the two major problem areas for managers are how to motivate and how to reduce conflict.

Take the owner who is contemplating firing some of his employees. It is not that he is doing something wrong by giving them a handsome benefits package and good working conditions. He is just not doing enough. If you are in his situation you should ask yourself these questions: Do your employees participate in decision making? Do they have promotion opportunities? Do they think you have made promises you have not fulfilled? Do you reward them for initiative and superior performance?

People will work for money, but except in extreme circumstances, they resist working for money alone. They also want recognition, security and opportunity. There is, accordingly, a simple solution for the supervisor of those 100 demoralized employees: Tell them "thank you."

It is human nature to like praise and to be motivated to work for it. I often tell my clients, "Do you want to make \$1,000 in five minutes? Go and give an employe a word of praise. His work rate will increase, his motivational level will rise, and he will pass along his good mood to others!"

And you must be aware that all the good work and good feeling you build up can be destroyed in ways you little expect. Take the supervisor who was amazed to find out that her two best employes thought she disliked them.

It can happen like this: The manager is worried about a procurement problem. Frank, the employe, passes the manager in

the corridor and greets her with a smile. The manager, engrossed in her problem, looks up briefly and mumbles a reply. Frank's mood drops. He wonders why she is angry with him, what he did, whether he is doing a good job.

The next day, the procurement problem takes a turn for the worse. Frank tries again. This time the manager does not even respond. Frank's worst fears are confirmed. And the manager does not even realize it.

Why does this happen? Employees are constantly gauging their job security and their employer's satisfaction with their performance by the expression they see on the manager's face.

OFFICE CONFLICT at its worst is caused by a deliberate troublemaker. Here is a typical case:

"I work with a manager who constantly criticizes me and the other managers. He likes to show my boss how knowledgeable he is and how he is the only guy who can 'get anything done around here! The boss laps it up, and the two of them have lengthy conferences discussing all the employees. This guy is bent on climbing to the top over our bodies. What should we do?"

These professional conflict makers create morale problems, credibility problems and eventual productivity problems. They can be cunning and vicious, but they flourish only where the boss is a willing participant.

Professional conflict makers devote so much of their energies to criticizing others' performances that their own tasks are neglected. You can find subtle ways of pointing that out to their superiors.

Worth noting is that professional conflict makers rarely confine their volleys to employes. Their highly critical appraisals usually include disparaging remarks about the boss and his management style. At the appropriate time, you might wish to share with your boss your concerns about the damage being done to the boss' own image in the eyes of the employes. By the way, bring along a witness or two. I will enhance your credibility. Keep your remarks dispassionate, and your boss will see the light.

A high level of employe motivation can make a company grow and flourish. Human conflict can reduce productivity and increase turnover. Business owners would be well advised to regularly monitor both. For a business they can spell life or death. - findarticles.com

Impressive titles are more than cheap rewards

More and more organizations are doling out impressive-sounding job titles, many including superlatives such as 'chief'. One reason is to stop key executives from leaving, according to Michael Jalbert, president of MRINetwork, a major search and recruitment organization. But titles such as chief marketing officer, chief innovation officer, and chief risk officer also mark the extra responsibilities that CEOs are delegating to senior staff.

Michael Jalbert said:

"CEOs and presidents of companies realize that running a successful business requires an effective leadership team. Many top executives have more autonomy in the running of their departments than ever before. This results in a greater sense of ownership and fosters loyalty."

Jalbert considers that 'chief' titles are best used to signal strategically important issues in the organization. For example, banks often have a chief risk officer now to make sure that they are in compliance with laws governing accountability. And many businesses have a chief marketing officer to show the importance of customer acquisition. But organizations expect results in return for these titles.

"If the CMO can't deliver results fast enough - such as increase market share and improve brand awareness - they don't last long," said Jalbert.

Retaining top talent is a particular problem in organizations with flat structures. Inventing posts with prestige titles is one of the few options to keep employees happy in their careers. "Some of the more creative



chief' titles cater to the desire of up-and-coming managers to possess titles that reflect what they do. This generation of workers is unimpressed with traditional titles and impatient to get ahead. They're also willing to change jobs to get what they want," he said.

But 'title creep' can be counter-productive. Jobs that do not deliver on impressive titles repel rather than retain talent. "People can easily see through new titles that offer prestige in name only. If the job doesn't also bring added responsibility and recognition, employees can feel that they are being manipulated," said Jalbert, observing that the title "vice president" has become so common that it is almost meaningless.

"Meaningful recognition within the organization is critical," said Jalbert. "Mere titles won't suffice in the long term."

Celebrity CEOs

Executive titles, rewards and personal self-belief are inter-twined. Mathew Hayward of the University of Colorado at Boulder and co-authors Violina Rindova and Timothy Pollock of the R. H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland at College Park published an intriguing paper "Believing One's Own Press: The Causes and Consequences of CEO Celebrity," in the July 2004 issue of Strategic Management Journal. In this paper they pointed to the unhealthy relationship between CEOs' belief in themselves and the way they were written up in the media. They argued that executives should not believe their own press because it tended to become bad news for their organizations.

According to Mathew Hayward, who has since written a book on the

same theme (Ego Check: Why Executive Hubris is Wrecking Companies and Careers and How to Avoid the Trap), journalists often create an inflated image of CEOs by attributing their organizations' positive performances solely to their CEOs' strategic actions. The trouble begins, said Hayward when they start to believe the hype.

"What you have is journalists affecting the outcome of how businesses are run by affecting the CEO," Hayward said. "Once CEO celebrities are created, they tend to believe the hype and see themselves as invincible. I think this has greatly contributed to the CEO excesses we have seen over the past few years."

The public are fascinated by celebrities and perhaps the media is just giving the public what it wants, more celebrities. But Hayward says there's more to it than that.

"The public wants to believe that individuals are in control, so they happily accept these accounts as being true."

"When CEOs display idiosyncratic personal behavior in public, it becomes easier for journalists to provide accounts that bolster attributions of the firm's action to its CEO."

"By and large this is very dysfunctional for the company, because when CEOs buy into their own celebrity, they will tend to want to have the company revolve around them. Most notably they will want to continue the behavior and actions that got them on the magazine cover, which isn't necessarily good for the company." - hrnguide.com

Examine the pros and cons of taking a management path in your career.

Are you wondering whether you want to be a manager, deciding if a management path is right for your career? Maybe the company has suggested a supervisory position for you. Maybe someone in your life is pushing you to "make more out of your life." Or are you trying to decide whether to get your Masters degree in your technical specialty or go for an MBA instead.

Whatever the reason you are considering a management career, this article will help you decide whether or not management is for you.

The upside of being a manager

There are many positives to being a manager. Managers generally are paid more than others in the company. They appear to have more power. And the power and pay differences tend to give the position more status or prestige.

Pay: Certainly the top manager in a company, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is paid more than anyone else in the company.

Managers below the CEO are generally paid more than everyone in their group as well, but not always. I managed a group of scientists in which the very top scientist

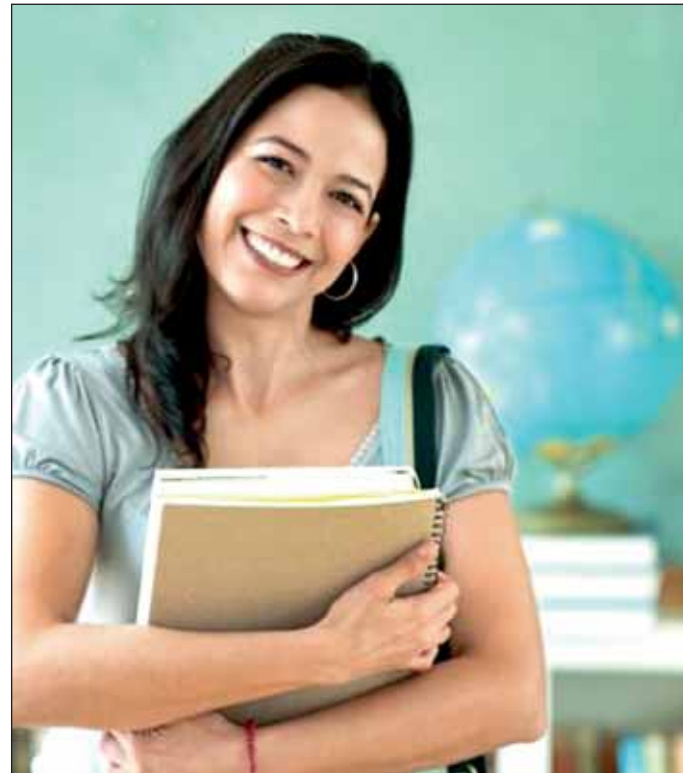
Is management for me?

were paid more than I. Smart companies pay their people based on their value to the company, not on their title or position, and in that company, key scientists were more valuable than their manager.

Power: Most people, including most managers, believe that managers have more power than the people in their groups. While it's true that managers commonly have certain functional authority delegated to them, like setting work schedules for the group, true power cannot be delegated to you from above. You are only as powerful as you are capable of making your group more successful. And while your ability to lead the group greatly influences it, your power comes from the willingness of the people in your group to grant it to you.

Status/Prestige: In our society, people value titles. A title of Senior Vice President, or Worldwide Marketing sounds much more impressive than Research Chemist. However, the marketing person may work for a 3-person company and make \$30,000 per year while the chemist works for a major oil company, supervises 4 other chemists, and makes well over \$100,000 per year.

Sense of Personal Accomplishment: If your goal is to be CEO of General Motors, you probably should start now on a management career. If you want to be President of the United States, a management track isn't required. Several recent Presidents have managed nothing but their campaigns. If you want to brag to your mother-in-law about what a success



you are, and power, prestige, and money are important to your definition of success, management may be the way to go. If you measure success by friendships and how soundly you sleep at night, a management career can give you that, but so can many others.

The Downside of Being a Manager

Nobody likes the boss and it's lonely at the top. You're the person who always has to make the decision, right or wrong, and somebody is always out for your job. On top of that there are legal liabilities that non-managers don't have as well as financial restrictions.

Lonely At The Top: You are not as close to the employees in your group when you are the boss. You can't afford to be. A manager needs to be a little removed from the employees in order

to objectively make the hard decisions.

Many first time supervisors, promoted from within the group to supervise it, are amazed at how quickly former friends become cold and distant. Even an experienced manager, brought in from outside, finds the employees more aloof than they are with each other.

No Immediate Reinforcement: A painter gets almost immediate feedback on whether or not he's doing a good job.

Is the paint the right color; is it going where it should. A programmer also finds out pretty quickly whether or not a new sub-routine runs. Management isn't that way. Goals are usually more long-term, quarterly or even annual. The real measure of a manager's success, an improvement in their people management skill is even more long term and more dif-

icult to manage.

If you want immediate feedback on how well you're doing, try widget manufacturing. If you can wait months or longer for feedback, management may be for you.

Buck Stops Here: You may, and in most cases should, have your employees make many of their own decisions. However, ultimately the responsibility for the final decision rests with the manager. When it appeared that insulation might have damaged the space shuttle wing, it was a manager who had to make the decision. It's the manager's job to make the decision, right or wrong.

Somebody Always Wants Your Job: There is always someone after your job. Sometimes several people are. As a first line supervisor, you may have several people in your group who think they could do your job better and are actively working to get that chance. As CEO of a company, you have several people within your own organization who want your job and more people on the outside who are after it as well. They may not agree with the decisions you made (see above) or felt they could have made better decisions. You may have actually made a wrong decision and they will use that as leverage to try and push you aside.

The higher you go in any organization, the fewer positions there are at that level and the more competition there is for them.

Legal Liabilities: Managers have legal liabilities that most workers don't. Managers frequently have to sign documents, they have to ensure the workplace is free from harassment, they have to keep their people safe. If a manager fails in any of these responsibilities, they may be held legally liable.

