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The Magic of (A)ffective Management

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Abstract

(A)ffective management is a people-first approach to managing employees. After all, employees and supervisors are people first. No matter how hard any individual may try, inevitably the stress and strain of life outside of work can and will bleed through into the work environment. The (A)ffective and effective manager understands this and incorporates this understanding into how he/she interacts with superiors and subordinates in the work environment on a daily basis. This article offers strategies on how to be an (A)ffective manager.

Introduction

(A)ffective supervision of employees can take a large amount of time and effort if a supervisor is to implement the strategy effectively. A supervisor must take the time to get to know his/her employees and, within constraints, allow the employees to get to know him/her. Knowing an employee's likes, dislikes, motivational structure, life circumstances, and communication style(s) is invaluable to being able to relate to an employee in an effective and productive manner, motivate an employee to do his/her best work in the time constraints available, and maintain and hopefully raise the level of job satisfaction among all of the employees. The following article describes some strategies on how best to communicate with employees and build and maintain a supervisory methodology that ensures employee and supervisor satisfaction. The strategies that each supervisor employs will be unique as each institution and set of employees is unique. However, the goal of (A)ffective management for every supervisor is to build a mutual trust between the supervisor and supervisee, thus allowing for a more productive and effective work environment.

"I Leave My Personal Life at Home": Fact or Fiction?

During the course of working as a supervisor, many have most likely at least thought or said aloud the phrase(s), "leave your personal life at home" or "your personal life belongs at home." Indeed, most supervisors and employees endeavor to do so. However, for most, no matter

how hard they try, inevitably they are unable to meet this daunting task every hour of everyday of the work week. Supervisors must realize that, like themselves, their employees are endeavoring to leave their personal lives at the front door of the office, but may not be able to do so.

Implementing an (A)ffective management strategy will foster an environment that will aid the employee in coping with issues unrelated to work by minimizing the inherent stressors of the work environment and by providing them with a support structure of colleagues.

Vignette One: Erin

Over the weekend Erin found out that her mother has been diagnosed with cancer. She has been in tears all weekend, and this new situation is further adding to the stress she has in barely making her bills every month. She comes into work Monday and seems to be distant. She misses her 2:30 meeting and misses the deadline for the project that was due for the day. Her supervisor, Ben, can tell that Erin is not herself today and is trying to decide what the best way to communicate with Erin is about her performance and attitude when she comes in the following day. Ben has not taken the time to interact with Erin other than assigning tasks and giving relevant feedback via e-mail and has no idea about what she is going through. Erin has gone home for the day, and he has a busy schedule the next day. Ben decides to send an e-mail to Erin so that she will see it the next morning when she gets in. He is polite, but also firm about her mistakes and what needs to be done to remedy the situation. Erin reads the e-mail that night.

Sending the e-mail to Erin is something that many supervisors may have done in the situation in which he/she was short on time and a situation needed to be addressed. The supervisor had noticed Erin was a little off, but did not think anything of it. It was a Monday, "everyone hates Mondays." Ben has not paid attention to the fact that Erin is always upbeat on Mondays and generally likes coming to work. He also did not stop to think about the fact that Erin always responds to his e-mails, even in the evenings, but always follows up in person the next day with worrying about the tone of e-mails and prefers to communicate in person.

Based on the supervisor's reaction, which of the following did he "know" about Erin and effectively use:

1. Communication Style
2. Motivation
3. Likes/Dislikes
4. Life Circumstances

Answer: None of the Above

Vignette Two: Erin

Ben sent the e-mail to Erin e-mail at 5:30 p.m. Erin gets home around 5:00 p.m. after going to the doctor with her mother. The news they received was less than encouraging. After sitting down and paying her bills, she opens up her work e-mail as she always does. When she opens up her e-mail, she immediately sees the message from her supervisor. While he was very polite in the e-mail, Erin becomes frightened by the perceived tone of the message and immediately sends a long apology e-mail. Erin is unable to sleep that night, wondering how much trouble she will be in the next morning and if she should share with her supervisor what is going on that lead to her forgetfulness. She has always heard that employees should leave their life circumstances at the door. This fact has been reinforced by Ben's failure to ever inquire about how she is doing or to ask her what is wrong on the days when she is not her jovial self. She manages to sleep for an hour or so before the alarm blares. She has a knot

in her stomach thinking about going to work that day and is so agitated she forgets the project papers on the kitchen table.

For Erin, and arguably most of the employees that work in libraries, it is better to discuss issues that are of a negative nature during a face-to-face meeting. By sending an e-mail after the work day ended, many undesirable and unintentional results may arise. Be cognizant of the fact that many employees do check and read e-mail after work hours. Having a face-to-face conversation about a negative issue allows the employee to clarify the issue and ask any questions that he or she may have for the supervisor. It also allows the supervisor to ensure that the original instructions were understood and to confirm that the employee now knows what is expected.

Employees Should Respect Me for My Position

Employees should intrinsically respect the managerial hierarchy. However, respect, true respect, is earned. Respect is built over time and goes hand in hand with a mutual sense of trust. Managers are responsible for facilitating tasks and providing the oversight, direction, and materials needed for subordinates to accomplish the tasks assigned. A manager should be his/her staffs' number one advocate. Being an advocate for staff is one of the best and surest ways to build mutual trust and respect.

Managers should have the outlook of "the buck stops here." Any issues that arise from their departments are ultimately their responsibility. It is important for staff to know that their supervisor "has their back." If an error is made, the staff understands and appreciates that the manager will take the heat from external constituents and will discuss with them later what needs to be done to correct the issue. Adopting this mentality will allow staff members to perform duties more efficiently and effectively.

Having a true open-door policy is also very important to ensure the highest level of output from employees. Employees need to know that if they have an issue, they may come to the supervisor's office and speak their minds and,

perhaps more importantly, that they will be taken seriously and there will be no repercussions for doing so. It is better for employees to be able to address their issues and complaints with the supervisor than for them to remain at their workstations and be less productive due to being distracted by something that is bothering them.

Vignette 3: Marjorie

Marjorie was sitting in a meeting this morning, and, to her shock and horror, she believes that her new supervisor, while not calling her out by name, has accused her of taking extra-long lunches. Marjorie prides herself on her punctuality and takes great offense at the insinuation that she would steal time from the university and library by taking longer lunches than where appropriate and not reporting them. While her supervisor, Anne, is new, she knows that she has an open-door policy and has encouraged all employees to come to her at any time with any issue.

Option 1: Marjorie Stays at Her Desk

Wanting to maintain her composure and to avoid a potential confrontation, Marjorie decides to stay at her desk. She sits and ruminates on the morning's meeting all day and does not perform her duties to the high standard that she normally does. At the end of the day, the report that she turns in is full of errors. This causes problems for her supervisor who must now stay late to correct the report before she turns it into the dean the following morning.

Option 2: Marjorie Decides to Talk to Her Supervisor

After the meeting, Marjorie stops her supervisor and asks if she may speak with her in private. Anne, who has an open-door policy, gladly agrees. Marjorie and Anne proceed to Anne's office and close the door. Marjorie tries to control her emotions, but accidentally raises her voice. She is surprised to see no visible reaction from Anne. After Marjorie finishes, Anne calmly explains that the meeting this morning was at the request of the dean and had nothing to do with anyone in the technical services department, but the dean wanted the information shared library-wide as not

to single anyone out. Anne apologizes for not doing a better job of explaining in the morning meeting and thanks Marjorie for coming to her with the issue. Anne also drafts an e-mail to the other employees in the department clarifying the morning meeting.

Marjorie's situation illustrates that it takes more than an (A)ffective manager for the (A)ffective management strategy to work. If Marjorie would have chosen option one, not only would her day have been affected, but that of her supervisor as well. By choosing option two, Marjorie trusted that her manager meant what she said about her open-door policy. Her manager, in turn, reinforced Marjorie's trust and gained valuable insight that may have enabled her to proactively address concerns other employees had about the morning meeting.

Conclusion

Tips for (A)ffective Managers

1. Practice a people-first approach
2. Build healthy relationships with employees
3. When in doubt, use face-to-face communication in negative circumstances
4. Have a genuine open-door policy and back it up in practice
5. Build trust (remember trust is always a two way street)
6. Be the employee's number one advocate (this includes seeking pay increases and promotions for them if a process for this is available and warranted)
7. Lead by example
8. Adopt the "buck stops here" viewpoint
9. No one can leave his/her personal life at the door 100% of the time

Being an (A)ffective manager is a conscious decision that a supervisor makes on a daily basis. It takes time and effort to build the relationships

that are essential to the success of this strategy, but the potential productivity and job satisfaction increases are well worth the effort and will most likely offset the time investment in a short period of time. Remember, knowing an employee's likes, dislikes, motivational structure, life circumstances,

and communication style(s) is invaluable to being able to relate to an employee in an effective and productive manner. Doing so will motivate an employee to do his/her best work in the time constraints available, and maintain/raise the level of job satisfaction among all of the employees.