embrace change

BE THE

build respect and trust

BOSS YOUR

set a winning atmosphere

EMPLOYEES

prepare for tomorrow

DESERVE

maximize potential

Ken Lloyd

BE THE

BOSS YOUR

EMPLOYEES

DESERVE

Ken Lloyd, Ph.D.

CAREER PRESS

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This book is dedicated to
Roberta:
This one's for you!
And to
L. K. Lloyd and Max Winston
This one's for you, too!

Acknowledgments

In my years of consulting, I have been very fortunate to work with a multitude of company presidents, managers, and supervisors who can easily be best described as the boss their employees deserve. To all of them, I offer thanks for demonstrating what it means to be such a boss, and for proving that such an approach generates success in all senses of the word.

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What in the World Do Employees Deserve from a Boss?

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That Was Then

*I*n the not so distant past, there was no real concept of employees deserving much of anything from a boss. In fact, the equation was typically phrased in the exact opposite direction. Namely, what do bosses deserve from their employees? And the answer was simple: plenty.

Bosses sensed that they deserved obedience, loyalty, compliance, commitment, productivity, deference, respect, and service, to name just a few. If a boss were asked what the employees deserved, the response would have been something like, "The employees should be happy they have a job. If they work hard and stay out of trouble, they deserve a paycheck."

The longer-term notion was that if the employee came to work on time, did good work, and met the boss's expectations, the employee could expect job security, regular pay increases, promotions, a bigger office, and maybe even lifetime employment.

It is not as if this philosophy existed in some ancient era. Rather, this philosophy has only recently moved onto the endangered concept list. Bosses who still hold onto this approach find that they are unable to hold onto something far more important: employees.

The Boss Who Likes to Boss

One of the best ways to increase dissatisfaction, stress, resentment, rebellion, and turnover is to figure that your job as a boss is to boss the employees around. This approach may have worked in the past, but so did dial telephones. Speaking of which, if you go with the outmoded style of being a boss, plan on spending a lot of time on the phone chatting with recruiters, classified advertising departments, and applicants, trying to fill the positions of the people who have quit.

Quick Thinking in a Slowing Economy

Some bosses make the mistake of thinking that in a slowing economy, they can manage any old way that they want. The assumption is that there will be more qualified applicants floating around in the labor pool, and if there is some turnover, the departing employees can be easily replaced. Putting aside the enormous direct and indirect costs associated with finding and ultimately hiring someone new, the fact is that even in a slowing economy, the labor market continues to be tight. In fact, in any labor market, there is always a premium placed on skilled, motivated, and energetic employees. In a word, there is never an abundance of the kinds of employees you want to hire.

This Is Now

The world of work has changed quickly and dramatically. By adjusting to it and becoming the kind of boss that your employees deserve, you are truly creating a win-win situation. Your employees are going to be more productive and satisfied, your department and even your company are going to perform better, and you are going to make yourself far more promotable.

In order to become the boss that your employees deserve, the foundation is premised upon treating them with *respect* and *trust*. This immediately highlights the importance of taking the time to know your employees as individuals, and to build upon the skills, abilities, and

motivations that they bring to the job. Another watchword that will help build your effectiveness as a boss is *flexibility*. The days of rigid organizational structures, rigid managerial policies, rigid dress codes, and rigid demands are gone. Some bosses might claim that these types of changes have tied their hands and prevent them from ever being effective. However, as you will see, these changes have actually untied your hands and those of your employees, empowering them to work at their greatest potential.

The list of key words for you to incorporate into your style includes *communication*, *feedback*, *fun*, *balance*, and many more. You are about to learn them all and see how incorporating each into your style as a boss will make you the kind of boss that your employees deserve, while granting you the kind of satisfaction and success that you deserve.

Section One:
Building the Foundation

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*T*here is a vast array of actions you can take in order to become the boss your employees deserve. However, that does not mean you can simply plug in a batch of behaviors and instantly make the transition. Rather, there is a basic sequencing that you must follow, lest your efforts to become such a boss crumble.

For example, broadly based recognition programs are one of the many hallmarks of what it means to be the boss your employees deserve. But if you just go out and start throwing more formal and informal thanks at the team, along with implementing some snazzy awards programs, there may be no interest at all.

Every step you take as a boss fits into a larger context. If that context is not premised on such foundational blocks as respect, trust, and ethical treatment, none of the motivational programs—or any other programs—that you implement will work. After all, if the employees sense that they are neither trusted nor respected, there is minimal likelihood that they will respond positively to your efforts to build communication, motivation, teamwork, or much of anything else.

As a result, the first step in becoming the boss your employees deserve is to build a solid foundation of trust, respect, ethics, and more. As you read through this first section, you will be given the tools to develop that strong base. With this foundation in place, any subsequent steps you take are more likely to have the intended positive impact while helping you become the boss your employees seek, respect, trust, and deserve.

Use Those 2 Little Words

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*E*xperts are constantly asked if there is one best way to manage. Is it best to use a participative style and empower the employees? Does that approach really work in a slowing economy or during times of intense organizational pressure? Why not just focus on quality, reengineering, or knowledge management? Isn't there a way to simplify the process?

In a word, bosses are always looking for that one word that is the essence of effective management. The hope is to somehow take all of the behaviors that typify a great boss and boil them down to a mantra that can be repeated and then instantly applied to any situation at work. And by doing so, they can then become the boss that their employees deserve.

Ask the Guru

There was once a management guru who spent 20 years trying to understand the very essence of greatness in a boss. He traveled the world and studied countless organizations, associations, societies,

tribes, and tribunals, and then retired to a mountaintop to contemplate. At last, he proclaimed the one word that he found to be the quintessential meaning of management. The word was *nut*. But, alas, he took a vow of silence and would say no more.

Bosses around the world took this enigmatic finding and tried to analyze it. Some claimed it meant that bosses need a strong exterior, and soon enough, there were "tough love for managers" seminars and books everywhere. At the same time, others asserted that *nut* implies that greatness comes from within. And so came an onslaught of programs in self-esteem, personal empowerment, and managerial meditation. Still others proclaimed that the word *nut* means that if you have one great boss, you always want more. This belief led to instant changes in company succession planning, recruiting, and selection systems.

At last, the guru descended from the mountaintop for an exclusive guest appearance on a popular television talk show for an undisclosed amount of money. "Great guru," he was asked, "how can the essence of being a remarkable boss all boil down to the word *nut*?" Slowly the guru looked up at the hostess and said, "All right, all right, so it's not a nut. How about a bow tie? Or maybe a shoelace?"

Could it be that the guru had spent a few too many years on an oxygen-depleted mountaintop? The audience erupted with a burst of heckling, hooting, and cat-calling, and a wave of panic spread across the guru's face. Then the obviously rattled guru jumped up and cried out, "If you think there's one word that can make you a great boss, you're a nut." Gradually, silence spread across the audience, followed by cheers and robust applause. The guru smiled knowingly while secretly wondering why in the world the audience now liked his ideas about bow ties and shoelaces.

The 2 Most Powerful Words

Although there is no single word that encapsulates all that you need to know in order to be the boss your employees deserve, there are two words that will always serve as an excellent guide. No matter what you are doing as a boss, whether it's hiring, coaching, reviewing policies, or any other activity, all you have to do is ask yourself one question: "Am I treating my employees with *respect* and *trust*?"

This is a question that you should keep in the forefront of your mind when carrying out all of your responsibilities as a boss. Respect

and trust should serve as the foundation for everything you do as a boss. If you look at whatever you are doing and cannot honestly say that your behaviors are reflective of respect and trust, stop at once.

At best, treating employees with disrespect or distrust may provide a short-term solution to a particular situation; however, it is more than guaranteed to provide a much bigger problem over the long term. For example, there is not much trust or respect associated with micromanaging your staff, but it may be tempting to do so because it can be one way to get a project completed the way you want and when you want it. However, all that ultimately happens is that your employees are going to become more dissatisfied and less able to do their jobs themselves, leaving masses of work just for you.

The Message Is Everywhere

Most bosses immediately assume they already treat their employees with respect and trust, so they never give the issue a second thought. However, if you take a more careful look at your own behavior and at the bigger picture in your company, you may well find that your employees are getting a very different message. In fact, wherever you look in your department or the company at large, you can easily find signs that are telling your employees how much they are respected and trusted.

The secrecy policy

For example, many companies still have policies that regard pay practices as a big secret. When companies keep the pay practices shrouded in secrecy, the message to the employees is that they are not smart enough to understand the complexities of the pay levels, and, frankly, it is none of their business. This type of policy shows complete disrespect for the employees' knowledge, interest, commitment, and involvement in the company.

And further, pay secrecy shows total distrust for the employees. The implication is that if the company lets the employees see more of the financial information, not only will they fail to understand it, they will probably blab uncontrollably about it to friends, acquaintances, strangers, and even in chat rooms.

These same messages are attached to the related policy that demands that employees refrain from even talking about their own pay

levels. The implication is that the employees are literally and figuratively in no position to understand the vicissitudes of pay determination, and they will obviously become confused, flustered, and jealous by discussing them. This immediately tells the employees that they are viewed as children, and, as a result, certain topics are "no-no's." None of this says much for the levels of trust and respect placed in them.

Try to get open

Companies and bosses who want to show respect and trust in this financial area are now practicing what is called "open-book management." This approach is the exact opposite of the pay secrecy campaign. With open-book management, employees are given full and complete information not only about pay levels and pay determination, but about the company's entire financial picture. The obvious message is that the employees are mature, intelligent, and resourceful stakeholders in the company, and they clearly have the wherewithal to understand, analyze, and discuss matters of financial concern.

To be the boss your employees deserve, it will be important for you to continuously seek ways to demonstrate your trust in the employees and your respect for them. You are going to find countless opportunities every day to do this, because such opportunities appear in every aspect of being a boss, such as in the way you assign work, give feedback, measure performance, provide guidance, ask questions, and give answers.

For example, let's assume an employee has a question about his or her chances for promotion. Managers who play the disrespectful card either give a vague, meaningless, or mean-spirited response, such as, "You should be thinking more about getting your work done right now," or they may ignore the employee's question altogether. Providing the employee with even some basic guidance about his or her career path not only builds respect and trust, but also builds motivation, commitment, and positive attitudes.

On the Lookout

As a boss, it is also important for you to always be on the lookout for company policies and practices that treat the employees with low levels of trust and respect.

A sick policy

Some companies still have a sick leave policy that requires absent employees to have a doctor's note, even if they miss one day of work. This type of policy automatically tells the employees that the company does not believe them when they say they are sick. In addition, there is no concern for the employees' time and the aggravation associated with having to obtain a doctor's note. This treatment is demeaning, insulting, and humiliating. If you find these types of policies in your company, you should do all in your power to change them.

In these types of scenarios, it makes far more sense to push for policies that treat employees with respect and trust. For example, in the specific area of sick leave, many companies are now using a "personal time off" approach in which employees have a number of days off during a year, and they can use them as they wish. The idea is that the employees are adults, and they certainly are capable of handling this type of discretion over their time.

At your service

It is easy to overlook problems of trust and respect simply because you have become used to them. For example, during a recent client meeting to discuss these very issues, an administrative assistant entered with a tray of coffee for all of the attendees. A discussion with her later revealed that she finds this server role to be the one part of her job that she dislikes. She is more than willing to help in a pinch, but being expected to bring coffee to her boss and serve at meetings is a real dissatisfier.

In today's organizations with flatter structures, the idea of one set of employees serving others clearly rings of a low level of respect. If you want to be the kind of boss that your employees deserve, you should insist that they not bring you coffee. In fact, if your administrative assistant is in a pinch, you should bring the cup of coffee to him or her.

The Bottom Line

The key point is that every action you take as a boss is going to have a clear stamp indicating the amount of trust and respect that you have in your employees.

If your employees sense that they are being treated with low levels of trust and respect, there is a common outcome that is found across industry lines: resentment, lack of involvement, defensiveness, frustration, diminished productivity, and even sabotage.

At the same time, numerous studies have clearly shown that when employees are treated with trust and respect, there are measurable increases in motivation, commitment, loyalty, and productivity.

It is important to emphasize the fact that treating employees with respect and trust is far more than some "touchy-feely" fad that is destined for the behavioral science junk heap when next year's model arrives. Rather, treating employees with respect and trust is a philosophy of thinking and behaving that can truly help develop your employees and bring them to far greater levels of achievement, growth, self-esteem, and performance.

And further, when your employees see that you are truly committed to treating them with trust and respect, not only are you likely to see improvements in their performance, you are also likely to see an increase in the amount of trust and respect that they have in you. And when employees view you in this way, your chances of leading a productive, energized, loyal, and satisfied department increase dramatically. In a word, when you have built these mutual feelings of respect and trust, you have established one of the key foundational blocks in the process of becoming the boss your employees deserve.

Chapter 2

Stay in a Visionary Mode

For employees to be productive, committed, and involved, they need to have a complete understanding of where your department, area, or organization is going and what it is trying to be. In fact, they should have a clear picture in their minds of what it will look like. In a word, for you to become the boss your employees deserve, you need to have a vision that is shared among your team, and that vision has to be so clear that your employees can practically grasp it.

Picture This

Your vision paints a confident, expanding, futuristic picture. Importantly, when you talk about that vision with your staff, it is not in general language, such as, "Our vision is to be one of the truly great departments," or, "We are destined to do more than our competition."

Rather, a vision is described in visual language, such as by saying, "We will be busier than a bargain basement on the day after Thanksgiving, with our people working in well-oiled teams in wide-open areas

with no walls, no boundaries, and no reluctance to make rapid twists and turns that quickly meet the needs of our company's stakeholders, both internally and in the marketplace."

The vision from above

The vision that you develop has its roots in several sources. Part of the picture will come from ideas, inputs, and objectives expressed to you not only by your own manager, if you have one, but also from any significant others with whom you deal, such as your customers, your competition, your peers, and your company's topsiders. The vision that you establish for your department should be a reflection of the overall vision for the company, and it should be portrayed in a way that will help the company move toward its own vision.

Obviously, much of the vision for your department should come from you. As the leader, you should have a picture in your mind of what you would like your department to be. At the same time, by carefully considering the inputs that you have received from management, and combining them with your own ideas, particularly as you creatively review the department's resources, budget, and objectives, a picture is going to emerge. It should be in the forefront of your mind each day, and all of your actions as a boss should be focused on fine-tuning it and bringing your department a step closer to it.

The vision from below

At the same time, the vision should also be shaped in part by your employees' suggestions and comments. If you dump your vision on them without any opportunity for their inputs or discussion, they may react to it with reluctance and resistance. However, if they can sense that this vision also reflects some of their thoughts for the department and their own future roles within it, they will be far more likely to internalize the picture and work more diligently to reach it.

In today's workplace, if a vision is rigidly cast in stone, it tends to weigh a department down, rather than help energize it to meet its full potential. Just as your own vision adjusts to changes in the environment, your vision for your department or organization should be flexible as well. And insights into some of those changes in the environment may well come from your employees. By incorporating their ideas, you will truly be establishing a shared vision. After all, if the employees

help paint the picture, they will have a much stronger sense of owner-ship and commitment to it, and this can help motivate them to work even more diligently.

Use Your Common Senses

In putting together a vision for your department or organization, do not feel limited by focusing only on what you will see. Rather, your vision should include all of your senses. For example, as you look down the road, what will your department sound like? Will it be a noisy and clamorous hotbed of activity, or will it be a hotbed of quiet activity? Try to consider the physical feel and even the smells and tastes you might encounter.

The more that you and your staff can fully see, hear, taste, touch, and smell the vision, the more likely that all of you will be able to focus more accurately on the key behaviors to bring that vision closer.

Glue for the Picture

The vision that you and your staff share has a strong bonding and unifying quality as well. Once your staff members sense a common vision for their shared future, it is easier for them to work together to move toward it. In fact, the more they discuss this vision, the more likely they are to develop their own particular vocabulary and set of positively charged words and phrases that have a special meaning just for them. Their special language and other shared experiences will further help pull them together as a team.

In addition, when employees share a vision, they are more likely to share resources, advice, and support. Having a shared vision makes it easier for the employees to operate as one unit in pursuit of a mutu-ally beneficial outcome. As they do so, there tends to be marked in-creases in communication, cooperation, and coordination.

Do you hear a clique?

At the same time, as new employees are brought onto the team, it will be critical to bring them up to speed in this area. Unfortunately, the unity that results from a shared vision can form the basis of some cliques that exclude new employees. You will need to watch for this type of development and consider some additional meetings and shared

assignments to counter it. It is ironic that a vision that includes strong teamwork can actually lead to the development of such divisiveness. However, by staying tuned into this possibility, you can take preventive steps before your vision leads to division.

The Unclear Vision

If you don't have much of a vision for your department or organization, your employees are going to sense the void very quickly. Any area with a lack of vision tends to be plagued with confusion, indecision, conflict, and stress. There tends to be disagreement over assignments, priorities, and standards, ultimately leading to a lack of individual effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity.

As a boss, try to think of your vision as a picture on a television screen. The employees all tune in to the same picture to get an idea of where the department is going. However, if there is no vision, then the television screen is blank. Continuing with the analogy, when this occurs, there is no focus, no tracking, no fine-tuning, no power, and no fast forward. Rather, all that the employees see is a warped reflection of themselves, and that is a definite turnoff.

Someone Doesn't Get the Picture

A common situation encountered by many bosses is the employee who does not buy into the vision. The knee-jerk reaction in such a case is that the employee who is not on board should be shipped out. While that is always an option, there are some other considerations to be reviewed first.

If you have established a vision that is premised on being an open forum, where great emphasis is placed on individuality and creativity, then it is a violation of that vision to turn against an employee who may merely be demonstrating some of those characteristics. It is quite easy for many of your employees to become overly enamored with their own vision for the department, believing that anyone who disagrees with this vision must be disloyal, disruptive, or foolish. This is actually tunnel vision, and it can be quite unhealthy.

Visionary thinkers

The fact is that some of the greatest improvements to any vision can come from those independent thinkers who are willing to voice

their views in contradiction with the group, but perhaps for the betterment of the entity itself. So when an employee shows some resistance to the vision, he or she should be heard. By listening carefully to such an individual, you will determine quickly if he or she is truly interested in making improvements or in making noise.

The Upside to Your Vision

Having a vision for your department, area, or organization offers several additional advantages. In the first place, a clear and strong vision sends a very positive message to your staff. Research has found that when employees believe they are in a confident, successful, and focused environment, their behavior tends to take on those exact attributes. In addition, your positive vision sets the stage for a broad range of positive expectations among the staff. And, importantly, numerous studies have found that positive expectations typically lead to positive performance. In a word, by having a clear and positive vision for your department, you are far more likely to see positive behaviors from your staff.

Today's employees like to feel that they are on a winning team, and in a company and department that is on a visible track toward success. As the boss your employees deserve, your vision will lay that track, and your actions will be designed to help propel the team along it.

Chapter 3

Anchor Your Actions with Ethics

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*A*cross all industry lines, there is increased emphasis today on the importance of having leaders who demonstrate the highest of ethical standards. Of course, there is some question about the meaning of the phrase, "the highest of ethical standards," because ethical behavior is actually an absolute: Either bosses are ethical or they are not. A boss who is described "generally ethical," "fairly ethical," or even "quite ethical," is more accurately described as unethical.

Issues of leadership ethics have filled the newspapers, airwaves, and Internet in recent years, and one clear result is that employees are far less tolerant of bosses who are ethically challenged. Employees now expect and deserve to be treated ethically, and bosses who feel that this does not apply to them may soon be applying for another job.

What It Really Means

In a word, ethics are a set of moral and just principles that serve as a deep guiding sense of what is right, fair, and proper. As a boss, ethics apply to every action that you take and decision that you make,

whether directly impacting your staff or not. Matters of ethics underlie all of your responsibilities, and there will be ethically charged temptations jumping before you every day. It may be easy to succumb, but you and your employees deserve more.

Matters of Ethics

Most people in supervisory or managerial roles understand the technical aspects of their jobs quite well, but are often woefully unprepared for the reality of ethical dilemmas that await them each day.

The list of ethical issues is endless and includes such situations as:

▶ A manager who wants you to divulge the contents of a confidential conversation you had with one of your employees.
▶ An employee who flirts with you.
▶ A salesperson who offers you a rather expensive gift.
▶ Being provided with inside information that could make you a bundle.
▶ Noticing that something is wrong with a product that needs to be shipped immediately.
▶ A payroll error in your favor.
▶ Being asked to sign off on a project that you never actually reviewed.
▶ Keeping a commitment that is no longer convenient for you.

Ethical Violations Aren't Cheap

When bosses fumble and flounder in the ethical arena, several costly problems occur. In the first place, if a boss engages in unethical behaviors, his or her actions may be noticed by the employees, sending a message to all of the troops that unethical actions are acceptable. In a matter of time, the contagion of unethical behavior can infect your entire department.

When a boss engages in unethical behaviors, employees can become upset, distracted, and distressed. They may even spend a good amount of time discussing the errant behaviors of the boss. All of these reactions mean that the employees are doing something other

than working, and this has a measurably negative impact on their productivity.

Unethical behaviors by a boss can also generate legal exposure for the company. For example, if a boss squelches the actions of an employee who wants to report a potentially dangerous situation, or if a boss treats employees unfairly on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, or age, the legal exposure can be great and the costs can run into millions of dollars.

Your Ethical Toolbox

When you encounter situations where your ethics are being challenged and you are uncertain as to what to do, there are some simple guidelines that can help. Perhaps the easiest test is for you to look at the action that you are considering and ask yourself how it would look on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper.

Another approach that can help you figure out what to do in these types of situations is to consider the reactions of the significant others in your life. For example, prior to taking any action, ask yourself how it would sound to your own boss, pastor, spouse, friends, children, or parents. Do you think they would be proud of you and support what you did, or would they be upset or ashamed?

Additional items in this toolbox that can help you figure out what to do in ethically challenging situations are to ask yourself some key questions, such as:

- ▶ "Is this behavior legal?"
- ▶ "If I do this, who is going to be impacted, and in what way?"
- ▶ "How am I going to feel about this tomorrow?"
- ▶ "What are the possible ways that my actions can impact my department and the company at large?"

Listen to your stomach

Of course, one of the best tests to get a quick ethical reading on any action that you are considering is in the pit of your stomach. In fact, there are studies that show that many of the most successful businesspeople use "gut feel" as one of the primary barometers when making decisions.

The pit of your stomach is a reflection of your experiences, perceptions, values, and knowledge, all wrapped together. If the mere thought of taking a particular action turns your stomach, then you should put on the brakes and think more carefully about what you might be doing.

Ethical Support for Your Team

In light of the high degree of employee interest in ethical behavior and treatment, there are some additional steps you can take to provide further support in this area.

Instant access

One important step is to let all of the employees know that if they have any questions or concerns about ethical matters or developments, you want to hear about them as soon as possible. When your employees do approach you on these kinds of issues, be sure to listen carefully, respect their confidence and anonymity, express appreciation for their willingness to bring the issue to you, and let them know what you are going to do about it. After you have taken steps to deal with the situation, be sure to let the employees know.

Confidence in confidentiality

Because some employees may be concerned about a lack of security or confidentiality associated with discussing ethical issues, you may want to consider providing some alternative channels for them to communicate ethical concerns. In this regard, some companies have designated anonymous surveys and "hot lines" just for this issue.

Train the team

Another step that can be helpful in this area is to provide your employees with some training on ethics at work. This not only further demonstrates your commitment to ethical behavior, but also provides the employees with some tools to understand the issue, revisit their own ethics, and take action to deal with ethical problems that they may face.

You Be the Judge

There are going to be times when your employees ask you to adjudicate a disagreement over an ethical issue. In many of these instances, there are claims and counterclaims regarding broken commitments, unfair behavior, lying, or other violations of company standards or expectations.

The disagreements that reach you are often rather complex, for if they were not, the employees could have resolved them on their own. If you keep the ethical tools in mind, you have a head start when it comes to dealing with these types of conflicts. However, sometimes you have to take an extra mental step to get to the heart of the matter. Take a look at the following ethical parable and think how you would resolve it.

As a matter of fact

Two businessmen, one single and one married, were partners in the old country, and they went on a business trip to sell their wares. It was a very successful trip, and by the end, they had amassed 200 pieces of gold. As they were about to head home, the married businessman became ill and died. As he was dying, he told his partner, "Give my loving wife whatever you want." The businessman agreed to do that, and he then traveled back to the village. He told his late partner's wife of her husband's untimely death, and he then gave her one piece of gold. The grieving wife was stunned when told that her loving husband of many years said that his business partner can give her whatever he wants.

Now, the widow knew that her late husband was a smart, caring, and ethical man, and she could not figure out why he would have done something like this, so she said to his partner, "I think it is only right that we go to the wise man in the village, tell him what happened, and let him be the final judge in this matter." The business partner sensed that this was a good way to put the issue to rest, and he figured he had nothing to lose. So, he agreed.

The wise man heard both sides of the story and then pondered for a moment. What do you think he said? He could have said that a deal is a deal, because there was no disagreement over what the deceased businessman had agreed to. The deceased man made a commitment,

and it is only ethical that it be kept. The wise man could also have suggested that the two parties sit down and see if, as friends, they could do a little compromising and come up with a more equitable split. But he did none of this.

Instead, he looked at the businessman, pointed to his partner's widow, and said, "Give her the 199 pieces of gold, and keep one piece for yourself." The shocked businessman protested, "But her husband specifically said I could give her whatever I want." The wise man responded, "Precisely, and you want 199 pieces of gold."

The wise man had listened very carefully to both sides of the issue and looked at the entire picture, not just a few compelling details. The wise man saw that the deceased businessman was smart, ethical, and loving, and this obviously meant that something was amiss. The wise man then reasoned that the deceased businessman was giving his partner a chance to demonstrate his own ethics. On the one hand, if the partner decided to be overly generous and give the widow the lion's share of the gold, he would be rewarded for doing so. But if the partner acted unethically, he would be punished. The deceased man knew that his wife would get help on this one, and that ethics would ultimately prevail.

The Moral of the Story

As you deal with ethical conflicts among your employees, you have a broad range of options. In some cases, it will be appropriate for you to suggest that they continue to try to resolve the matter themselves, while in other cases you may need to play more of a facilitator role. And further, the facts of a situation may call for you to take even more decisive and definitive action to resolve the matter.

Either way, in all matters of ethics, it will be important for you to listen carefully, look at the totality of circumstances, avoid being dissuaded by a few superficial facts that may be obscuring the real issues, and keep your ethical toolbox wide open. As a boss, that's the right thing to do, and that's what your employees want and deserve.

You Set the Culture

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$\mathcal{T}$oday's employees seek and deserve a work environ-
ment where they can work productively, think cre-
atively, grow and develop, voice their inputs, and advance their
careers. For this to happen, there needs to be a culture that actively
supports these objectives, and a great part of that culture depends
mightily on the behaviors of the boss.

Every department is a mini-society with its own culture that in-
cludes traditions, values, standards, customs, rules, and even language.
A department's culture is reflected in all sorts of tangible and intan-
gible ways, ranging from the amount of risk-taking behaviors all the
way to the interior design, dress policy, jokes, status symbols, stories,
legends, and ceremonies.

More Than Words

If you ask most bosses about the kind of culture that their em-
ployees deserve, the typical responses focus on such lofty cultural
values as fairness, growth opportunities, dynamic change, respect for

individuals, and open communications. As evidence of the presence of such values in their own departments, some bosses proudly point to the beautifully framed mission statement prominently displayed on the wall.

The fact is that employees do deserve a corporate culture that is premised on the kinds of values noted above, but simply articulating such values and posting pretty statements about them has minimal impact on the real culture of your department. A mission statement is an expression of ideals, and, unfortunately, it is often not much more than a statement.

The guiding force for the culture is not a mission statement. Rather, it is the boss. And as the boss, your behaviors play a critical role in shaping and focusing the culture in your department. The actions you take will greatly determine which aspects of the departmental culture will be followed and which will be ignored.

Rewards and Punishments

One of the best ways to understand the culture that you are driving in your department, area, or organization is to look at the behaviors that are being rewarded and punished.

For example, it is very easy to say that the culture of your department encourages independent thinking, creativity, and innovative ideas. But what happens to the employees who demonstrate these behaviors?

When a person approaches you and indicates that he or she has a new way to handle a particular responsibility, do you:

‣ Tell the employee that you do not have time to discuss it now?

‣ Ask the employee to write it up and you'll look at it later?

‣ Tell the employee that he or she needs to focus more on job responsibilities and less on these kinds of matters?

‣ Tell the employee that you have tried all sorts of these "innovative" approaches in the past and they failed, so he or she should just do things as directed?

The actual message

If any of these responses sound a little too familiar to you, then you are actually punishing the very behaviors you claim are an integral part of your department's culture. In essence, you are punishing the employee for a behavior that seemed to be in line with the department's culture. And because people tend to avoid behaviors that generate a punishment, you are not likely to hear much in the way of new ideas from this employee in the future.

At the same time, if you react with encouragement and support when an employee approaches you with a new idea, you are rewarding the employee for his or her creative thinking. The advantage of doing so not only encourages the employee to continue his or her creative thinking and come to you with innovative ideas in the future, but this type of response also builds the employee's motivation, satisfaction, and commitment.

The word gets around

In addition, as the employee talks about your reaction to his or her idea, other employees will further understand that your departmental culture truly supports creativity. This encourages all of the employees to think creatively and increase their own involvement in their work.

Further, a supportive reaction to an employee for his or her creative idea also demonstrates your credibility and trust to all of the employees. After all, you have indicated that your department places a real value on creative and innovative thinking, and your behavior now demonstrates that you mean what you say.

What If the Employee's Idea Is Terrible?

Even if the employee's idea is as useless an idea as you have ever heard, he or she still deserves to be thanked and given some coaching feedback to increase the likelihood that future ideas will be more on the mark. After all, you want the employees to be continuously thinking innovatively and generating new ideas.

Many companies have developed some of their greatest products and services as a direct result of their employees' inventive thinking. While there certainly can be terrible ideas along the way, sometimes a

tweak can turn dull suggestion into sheer brilliance. Further, there can be some real gems hidden in the pile. When employees' ideas are ignored or trashed, the only idea that comes to mind is to avoid coming up with new ideas in the future.

In terms of the big picture, it is important to remember that it is human nature to repeat the behaviors that are rewarded, and to eliminate the behaviors that are punished. You can articulate all sorts of lofty ideals about creative thinking, but if your employees sense that they are being punished for trying to develop them, they are not going to do it. Thus, be sure that you truly reward the kinds of behaviors you would like your employees to repeat.

Besides, as discussed in Chapter 1, if you are interested in treating your employees with respect and trust, then it makes absolutely no sense to ignore their attempts at creative thinking.

Employee Promotions Also Promote Culture

One of the best ways to get an accurate picture of what is valued in your department and organization at large is to take a look at the people who are being promoted. A boss may claim that part of the culture is to place primary emphasis on employee merit, productivity, ingenuity, and drive. All of that sounds just great, but there is only one way to see if these are mere words. Take a look at the people whom you have promoted recently. Are they truly the high achieving and productive individuals, or are they more likely to be the employees who have put in their time, followed all the rules, and never really bothered you? Is it even possible that the employees whom you have promoted have been your buddies, or perhaps connected through family?

If the culture of your department is one in which the marginally producing employees are promoted, this leaves two options for your better performers who want to be promoted:

1. Become marginally producing.
2. Leave.

Either way, this does not paint a pretty picture for your department's future. Or, for that matter, for your future.

The kinds of people who are being promoted are a clear reflection of the kinds of behaviors that are valued and rewarded in your

department. Are they the best and the brightest, or are the best and the brightest those employees who have gone to greener pastures?

Who's on the exit ramp?

Speaking of greener pastures, you should also take a look at the people who are leaving for other areas or jobs. The real question is whether you are losing the marginal employees or the solid producers. If you find that the innovative, independent, hard-charging, and upward-striving individuals are migrating out, that is a clear sign that your departmental culture is not meeting their needs. They are moving to an organizational culture where their work styles, needs, objectives, and standards will be rewarded.

Employees today seek and deserve a work culture that truly values their performance, development, individuality, and productivity. It is very easy to claim that yours does just that. If you want a reality check, just look at the door and see who is coming in and going out.

When Words Collide

There are all sorts of terms, expressions, and catch phrases that can also give you considerable insight into the culture of your department. What is your image of a department where the following phrases are uttered:

▸ "We don't do things that way around here."
▸ "It can't be done."
▸ "If I want your opinion, I'll ask for it."
▸ "That's a dumb question."
▸ "That's not my job."

These types of comments not only reflect a stagnant, rigid, and rather unfriendly culture, they reinforce it. Ultimately, employees who are comfortable in this type of setting will stay, and those who are not will leave. And this trend will make for a very marginal team.

Watch your words

As the boss, you will want to make sure that your communications with the troops are reflective of the culture that you want to build. If you are truly interested in creative and innovative thinking,

the types of phrases noted above have to be removed or reworked. For example, the phrase, "It can't be done," should be replaced with, "It hasn't been done."

It is particularly revealing to look at the language in your department that is used to describe people who are more on the creative end of the spectrum. In some departments, they are positively described with such words as *innovative*, *brilliant*, *cutting-edge*, or *genius*. In other departments, these exact same individuals could just as easily be negatively described as *troublemakers*, *oddballs*, *weirdos*, or *know-it-alls*. In departments or companies that are dynamic, innovative, and growth-oriented, the independent thinkers are likely to be described with the former set of words, while such thinkers are likely to be described with the latter set of words in departments or companies that are flat, rigid, and stagnant.

Just like the promotion practices, language plays a key role in influencing, solidifying, or changing your department's culture. As the boss, your words are going to have a particularly powerful impact on that culture, directly and indirectly, because the words and terminology you use will greatly influence the language patterns of the people who report to you.

Conflicting Ideas

A key aspect of culture in any department is the way that conflict is viewed. In some departments, conflict is to be avoided at all costs. People are expected to be smiling and agreeable on all matters, and conflict is regarded as a disruptive and destructive behavior. In such a setting, people tend to avoid conflict and gloss over it when it arises.

The pros of conflict

The problem is that conflicts do arise in any department. As a boss, it is important to recognize that they are a natural development that can actually be quite healthy for your department. It is not as if employees want or deserve to be in a conflict situation, but they do deserve the benefits associated with a department that is secure and mature enough to effectively manage it.

In departments that foster a culture of growth, change, and dynamic thinking, there are conflicts all the time. This is what happens

when people are involved, concerned, and passionate about what they are doing. And when such conflicts arise, part of the culture calls for the parties to continue the discussion, listen to each other, play fair, and recognize that all of the players have the same broader objectives in mind.

Resolution of the conflict should not be reached by a directive or even by a vote. Rather, the discussion typically continues with more and more information being brought in. In many cases, the conflict is resolved because the discussion actually opens the players' eyes to more important issues that would have never been found if the conflict had been resolved by a directive.

When people are constantly nodding and agreeing with each other, it is often an indication that there is not much thinking, listening, creativity, or passion in the room. Rather, the people are going through the motions of agreeing with each other. This is one of the best formulas for making the worst decisions. With all of the nodding going on, the players are often just a blink away from nodding off.

Just to further demonstrate how healthy conflict can be, many marriage and family counselors believe that a marital relationship can be salvaged if the husband and wife tend to have some arguments and disagreements. However, when a couple has no such disagreements and then separates, the chances of saving the marriage decrease. The reason is that when people are arguing, they still have some deeper passion, concern, and involvement. When the arguing stops, those feelings are gone.

Rather than being proud of a department that is totally free of conflict, a boss is better advised to take a careful look at what may be behind the superficial smiles. A healthy departmental culture encourages healthy disagreements.

Keeper of the Culture

Employees seek and deserve a culture that fosters achievement, personal growth, creativity, honesty, and fair dealings. As the boss, you are the primary source of this culture, not only by word, but by deed. If you aspire to be the boss your employees deserve, it is essential for you to not only verbalize these values, but demonstrate them in all of your actions.

Be a Cool Boss

Every department and organization has its own climate. If you think back to any past job or look at your present job, you can easily describe it in meteorological terms. In fact, in many cases, the description of a department sounds a lot like a weather report. Does your office have a cold atmosphere? Do things ever heat up in your work area?

In any department, there's always something in the air that tells you a great deal about the way it is operating. Just like the weather outside, a department truly has its own combination of temperature, precipitation, and winds. You can often feel them as soon as you walk in the door.

Although adults may be stumped when children ask where the weather comes from, in a department the answer is quite simple: It comes from the boss.

Just look at how the work atmosphere changes in any department or company when one boss leaves and another is brought in. In a matter of days, the climate can be totally different. In fact, it is not

uncommon to find that the atmosphere of a department can vary during the course of the day dependent upon whether the boss is present or absent. When the boss is away, there is one climate, and when he or she is present, it can be totally different.

Whether you like it or not, the climate of your department falls under your umbrella.

It's in the Language

Stop for a moment and think about the meteorological words that are used to describe a department. These types of terms and phrases can quickly let a boss know if he or she is acting like the boss whom the employees deserve.

For example, you may hear that a particular action had a "chilling effect." This might occur when an employee comes up with a new idea and is told that the idea has been around for years, has never worked before, and won't work now. The boss then tells the employee to focus more on work and less on issues that have little to do with it. This kind of approach will send a message to the individual employee—and to all of his or her associates—that there is no interest in employee creativity or innovation. This type of reaction by the boss has a chilling effect on the entire creative process, no matter what may have been written in the company's mission statement.

When a boss has an unclear vision for a department or even for various work assignments, he or she may be described as being "in the clouds," and this can leave the employees "in a fog." Things are very different when the boss has a "crisp and clear" vision of where the department is going.

A department can have a warm and hospitable atmosphere, or it can be hostile and cold. When bosses treat employees with respect and trust, the atmosphere can be quite comfortable. This is not the case when bosses habitually rain on the employees' ideas or pour excessive work on them. In fact, bosses who habitually do this may be told to "chill."

In a word, one of the most powerful barometers that you can use to gauge your effectiveness as a boss is to check out the climate of your department.

Interestingly enough, when a department is referred to as being "cool," that is a very positive sign. This term connotes a department

that is creative, fast-moving, dynamic, and genuinely interested in the employees. In today's managerial literature, the most effective companies are often described as being "cool companies." And the best bosses are described as being "cool," too.

How to Be a Cool Boss

Employees today seek a cool boss, and most bosses would like to be cool. The problem is that there is often a good deal of confusion over what a boss needs to do in order to enter this zone. Fortunately, the barriers to entry are minimal.

If you want to be a cool boss, follow these key steps:

Cover the basics first

Before focusing on any cutting-edge programs and packages, make sure that the work environment is safe, and the pay and benefits are fair and competitive. If the basics are not taken care of first, the employees will keep focusing on them and will not notice much of anything else that you may be offering.

Make it informal

One of the hallmarks of cool is to have a flat organizational structure where employees at any level and in any position in your department can easily access each other as well as anyone in a leadership role. Formal offices, formal attire, and formal organization charts are kept to a minimum. All of the employees are expected to be open and communicative with each other. Spontaneity has a special place in these departments. All barriers, whether physical, psychological, or virtual are best kept to a minimum.

Let's get flexible

Many employees now seek flexibility in their job design and hours, and the cool boss tries to provide this as well. Naturally, some jobs are highly interdependent and call for the employees to be present for the full workday. However, there are still countless jobs that can be handled on a more flexible basis, perhaps with employees needing to be present only during a core band of hours. In this regard, telecommuting is one of the hallmarks of the cool department.

The cool boss develops an environment that is more fluid and chaotic than traditional companies, and this often includes the newest technologies, virtual meetings, spontaneous meetings, and a good deal of fun. The employees may well work long hours, but on some days you might find a chunk of them at a play, a ball game, or a movie. Some bosses keep pushing the cool envelope and include daycare, exercise sessions, community service, and a healthy dose of volunteerism.

Work/life balance

Cool departments recognize the importance of balance between an employee's work and personal life. Bosses in these departments continuously seek out and implement programs to meet the employees' needs in this area. Importantly, many of the best ideas regarding these programs come from the employees themselves.

A time to learn

The cool environment is also a learning environment, and the coolest bosses place major emphasis on employee education. The focus is not only on modeling appropriate behaviors in the department, but real support for training, classes, seminars, and outside educational programs. Today's employees are looking for work situations in which they can continue their growth and development, and cool bosses provide a broad base of opportunities for them to do so.

As part of the growth process for the employees, cool bosses also make sure that there is a minimum of unilateral decision-making, and a maximum of employee participation in the decision-making process.

Significant work

Having a vision and strong sense of ethics are hallmarks of a cool company, and employees in these companies enjoy being able to see the role, significance, and impact of what they are doing. They like to see not only how their work impacts the company, but how it impacts the company's performance and mission.

As a cool boss, you should also be on the lookout for challenging and growth-oriented projects for your employees, where they can see the measurable results of their efforts. To the extent possible, it will

also be important to tie some rewards to their performance, and make sure the employees see that relationship and know that it will be honored.

Right down to the individual

Cool bosses also take great strides to understand their employees as individuals, particularly in terms of their needs, abilities, skills, strengths, and objectives. With those factors in mind, the cool boss sets up projects and assignments that are meaningful and motivational to the individual employee. When it comes to treating employees in this environment, one size does not fit all.

Thirsty for diversity

Some of the coolest companies and departments are known for their diversity, not only in terms of race, disability, religion, gender, and sexual preference, but also in terms of the support for a diversity of ideas, values, beliefs, and experiences. In fact, cool bosses specifically reach out to hire as diverse a work force as possible.

Importantly, many studies have found that groups that are composed of highly diverse individuals tend to perform more effectively than homogeneous groups when making decisions. One of the key findings is that diverse groups tend to generate decisions that are more creative and productive.

What's Missing in a Cool Department?

The key element that's missing in a cool environment is an overriding adherence to tradition and the way things have always been done. It is not as if every method, approach, and standard from the past is automatically thrown out. Rather, it is just that they are not automatically followed.

After all, as recent economic events have proven, many of the strategies, styles, and objectives of the old economy still have a great deal of value. The companies that tried to throw out everything from the past, including the need to have a solid revenue model and means of making a profit, are now dot-goners. Today's cool companies pulled the best of the old economy and combined it with the dynamism and creativity of the new economy.

A cool department continuously monitors its rules, standards, policies, and procedures, viewing none as sacred. All of the employees are empowered to voice their ideas, inputs, and suggestions on ways to work better. Sometimes their ideas are implemented, sometimes they are not, but they are always solicited and respected. And the door is always open for more.

Use your climate control

So, if your employees are a little hazy about what to do, if you hear about some shady behaviors, or if someone feels that a particular approach is all wet, get together with the employees on the spot, listen to their concerns and suggestions, and work with them to implement change. These types of spontaneous discussions clearly help prevent a drought of creative ideas.

By keeping these concepts in mind, you will be one cool boss, and your department will have one cool climate. And that's the exact forecast that your employees deserve.

Section Two:
Key Concepts and Practices

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With a solid foundation built squarely on such elements as respect, trust, support, and ethics, the next step is to focus on the key concepts and practices associated with being the boss your employees deserve. In order to do so, you will need to have an up-to-date understanding of communication, change, leadership, motivation, and recognition.

It is quite common for a boss to toss these terms around rather casually, often relying on strategies, techniques, and approaches that are based on questionable or outdated assumptions. When this occurs, the boss is destined to take inappropriate steps in each of these areas, misdiagnose the problems that subsequently arise, and then take further inappropriate steps to correct them.

There have been many recent developments when it comes to communication, introducing change, leading and motivating the team, and providing recognition. For example, do you think it is human nature for people to resist change? After reading Chapter 7, you may think differently about that.

Today's employees expect a boss to not only have current knowledge in these areas, but also to be able to apply it on the job. This section is designed to give you the tools to do just that.

Communication: The Only Way Is Two-Way

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*E*ffective communication is at the very heart of what it means to be the kind of boss that your employees deserve. Importantly, communication is more than merely keeping the employees updated as to what may be going on in your department or in the company at large. To do that, all you need is a recorded message and a public address system. That's not communication. That's called dictation.

Defining Moments

By definition, communication is an exchange of thoughts, ideas, and information, whether by speaking, writing, signals, or behaviors. If you look at each component of this definition, you can easily see that real communication is far more than a few words strung together and delivered to your employees.

In the first place, notice that communication is an exchange. This means that for real communication to take place, there must be interaction, with each player participating.

Although your words are the most obvious carriers of whatever you want to convey to your employees, you are also going to be sending many nonverbal messages simultaneously, particularly through your body language, gestures, or intonation. In this regard, in face-to-face communication, a person's volume, tone, pace, and physical movements all have an impact on the message that is being sent, as well as on the way that it is received.

In a word, many elements beyond the words themselves send strong messages. For example, take the phrase, "You are doing a good job," and see if you can say it in a way that clearly indicates that the employee is doing a great job. Now take the same sentence and say it in a way that indicates that the employee is doing a rather mediocre job.

The key point is that everything you do during the communication process is sending a message to your employees. As a result, there are countless opportunities for miscommunication and confusion, particularly as the messages go through your employees' filter mechanisms.

Your Number-one Activity

Researchers continue to find that bosses spend the bulk of their time engaged in communication. In fact, the amount of time that bosses spend communicating with others has increased over the years. Not long ago, most of a boss's communication started the instant he or she walked in the office until the moment he or she left. Perhaps there would be the occasional early morning or late evening calls at home, but they tended to be the exceptions.

Business communication today never really stops. The boss gets up and checks his or her e-mail at home and sends off a few quick messages. Of course, there may still be a few early morning phone calls to handle. The biggest change occurs when he or she gets in the car, on the subway, the bus, or the train, because then it's cell phone time all the way into work. This period is followed by a full day of communication on the job, and then it's back to the cell phone on the way home. This is followed by some e-mail and phone calls at home. And, if any of this is not working, perhaps the pager is.

As a boss, you are constantly advising, informing, explaining, discussing, reviewing, counseling, guiding, suggesting, persuading, convincing, coaching, cajoling, humoring, and responding. And the way

that you communicate with your employees is going to play a major role in defining you as a boss. For example, when bosses are described as autocratic, dictatorial, supportive, involved, accessible, responsive, or flexible, what is primarily being depicted is their communication style. If you want to be regarded as a first-rate boss, you must be a first-rate communicator.

The Great Barriers

In order to be the communicator that your employees deserve, you will need to identify and eliminate the broad range of communication barriers that exist whenever people communicate. There are blockages throughout the communication process, and they are just waiting to muddle your message.

External blockages

By taking a careful look at the context and setting in which you are communicating, you can easily identify any number of barriers. These barriers can be as basic as the furniture, environmental noise, or general office traffic. When you perch yourself behind a massive desk, or if there are machines, vacuum cleaners, or CDs blaring in the background, the communication lines are going to suffer.

To the extent possible, try to pick a setting for your communication in which there are few if any physical barriers between you and your employees, and in which there are minimal assaults on their other senses.

One of the major external blockages is body language, but the issue is not as simple as many would have you believe. On the one hand, there are some physical gestures that can be easily interpreted. Obviously, if someone is glaring at you or waving a fist in your direction, his or her feelings are fairly apparent. However, it is a real mistake to make any sweeping judgments about the more subtle aspects of body language. For example, it is widely believed that crossed arms are a sign of defensiveness or disagreement. However, the fact is that while crossed arms may indeed indicate negative feelings, sometimes people cross their arms because it makes them more comfortable.

And further, it is often assumed that if a person sits forward, he or she is interested in what you are saying. However, many people sit

forward in a conversation if they are feeling drowsy, because this can help them stay awake. So, if the person with whom you are communicating sits forward, you can assume that he or she is either very interested or very tired.

If you have questions about what may be going on in a person's mind, it makes more sense to ask questions than draw sweeping generalizations from body language.

Internal blockages

You will also want to be on the lookout for any internal noise going on in your own head that can distract you and distort what you are saying and hearing.

Some of the more common internal blockages include your expectations, biases, wandering mind, or attention focused on other matters. When you are communicating with your employees, the best approach is to give them your undivided attention. If you are too busy at the time, or if you have other matters on your mind, you should try to either refocus or reschedule.

It is also important to remember that just as your own internal noise can interfere with the communication process, the people with whom you are communicating may be distracted by their own internal noise levels. Sometimes you can detect this by their questions, their distracted appearance, or their off-target comments.

When this occurs, it is an instant message for you to run a reality check to find out what the blockages may be. The best way to do this is to ask a few questions based on what you are observing, such as, "Have I missed something?" or "Did I not go into enough detail?" By focusing the question on your own actions, you make it much easier for your employee to answer honestly. Notice the different impact on the employee if, in the same situation, you ask, "Are you getting this?" Employees are quite reluctant to respond affirmatively to questions in which they may have to admit that they are not understanding something.

Depending upon what you learn from your positive questioning approach, you can then adjust your comments to increase the likelihood of having real two-way communication.

It is interesting to note that just as distractions in the external environment can interfere with communication, these internal distractions can be just as detrimental to the process. In fact, in the field

of communication, internal and external distractions are both referred to as noise.

Hurdling the Barriers

Without taking active steps to keep your communication on track, your message can easily be derailed. No matter what track you follow, it is important to remember that communication with an employee is not a matter of one sender and one receiver, but rather an exchange in which you and your employee are both sender and receiver.

What are you saying?

One of the key ways to knock down communication barriers occurs before you send any message. If you want to increase your chances of being clearly understood, your message should be clear in your own mind before you ever send it. If your thinking is a little vague, or if your objectives are rather sketchy, that is exactly how your message will be communicated and received.

A little tailoring

When a boss uses a particular communication technique that works very well with one employee, it can be tempting to use this same technique with everyone else. The problem is that a mode of communication that fits the needs and expectations of one employee can totally miss with another.

For example, some employees will respond well to terse messages, while others may need more time, more basic vocabulary, and more explanation. The fact is that your employees have a vast array of motivations, expectations, values, and styles that need to be recognized if you want to communicate effectively with them. By understanding as much as possible about your employees, you can then select the best style, channel, vocabulary, volume, sentence structure, content, format, and timing to communicate successfully with them.

A message from you

One of the most effective ways to skirt the communication barriers is to maintain a high degree of feedback throughout the process. Feedback is a constant barometer to let you know if the message you

are sending is the same one that your employees are receiving. When there is no feedback, it is as if you are trying to hit a target off in the distance, without checking your aim.

There are many ways to get the feedback you need. While some bosses ask a simple, "Do you follow me?" or "Do you understand the assignment?" most employees feel compelled to respond with a "yes" to these leading questions, because this type of phrasing indicates that the boss would like to hear no other response. It is far more effective to ask open-ended questions, such as, "How would you approach this?" or "What questions do you have?"

An important byproduct of this positive question-and-answer approach is that it helps create an atmosphere in which asking questions is entirely acceptable. In addition, your behavior demonstrates some productive feedback techniques, and this can help your employees learn and apply them.

Part of your objective as a manager is to build your employees' skill levels, and one important way to do this is by modeling the behaviors that you would like them to learn. At the same time, if you see your employees continuing to struggle with communications, you may want to consider implementing more formalized training as well.

A message from your employees

The first point to keep in mind when your employees are sending a message to you is the most basic of all: You need to listen. Many bosses pay lip service to the notion of listening, while their minds are a million miles away.

By definition, listening to your employees means that you are truly paying attention to what they are saying. It is not a passive process in which you nod and raise an occasional eyebrow. Rather, listening is an active and involved process in which you use several specific strategies to be absolutely certain that the message you are receiving is the one your employees are sending.

One of the better ways to listen—and let your employees know that you are doing so—is through various feedback techniques. A particularly effective approach is to rephrase what your employee has said. For example, after your employee presents his or her thoughts, you can say, "What you are saying is...." or "You are upset with...."

Another approach that facilitates listening is by summarizing what your employee has said. For example, when he or she has concluded a thought, you can say, "Let me recap what I've heard and you tell me if I've got it right." You should also interject questions whenever your employees' points are unclear to you. These questions are not in the form of an interrogation, but are asked in a supportive and constructive tone, such as, "I'm not certain what you mean. Can you clarify that for me?"

It can even be helpful for you to repeat what your employee has said, using his or her own words. For example, if the employee says, "There are several parts of this project that are confusing to me," you can respond by repeating the specific parts that your employee mentioned, or by saying, "Several parts?" This will show the employee that you have been listening, and it will open the door for him or her to elaborate further.

These listening techniques have the less obvious benefit of helping your employees understand and clarify exactly what they are trying to communicate in the first place. In addition, by repeating and rephrasing what your employees are saying, you not only facilitate the communication process, but you are also more likely to remember more of what is being communicated in the first place. After all, it is much easier to remember a conversation than a lecture.

Play it again

Another important step to help you bypass the communication blockages is to use a good deal of redundancy when communicating with your team. This not only means using some repetition in the actual conversation, but to use additional channels as well.

For example, beyond verbal communication, many bosses supplement their messages with memos, bulletin board messages on the company's Intranet, e-mail messages, online forums, and paycheck inserts, to name just a few. As Madison Avenue advertising has clearly shown, repetition in the communication process certainly helps a message sink in.

Getting out of the e-mail box

Some bosses and employees are literally and figuratively getting tangled in the Web. They tend to rely excessively on e-mail, with some

believing that once they have sent a particular message, the communication process is complete. This is merely one-way communication of the most limited form, because matters of intonation, volume, pace, and inflection are missing.

E-mail can be very helpful and productive for transmitting specific facts or data, but all sorts of problems can arise when the issues are even slightly complex, and that describes most business issues today. Because e-mail is one-dimensional and lacks so many of the elements present in face-to-face communication, there is a tremendous potential for conflict and confusion. The main reason is that neither the sender nor the receiver picks up sufficient cues to really know what the other is trying to say. As a result, even the most basic e-mail communication has the potential to quickly escalate into a war of words.

When your employees ask you to intervene electronically to resolve a misunderstanding, do not do it. Rather, pick up the phone to discuss the situation, or, preferably, set up a face-to-face meeting. It's rather amazing that many of these meetings actually involve people who work just down the hall from each other.

Speaking of Costs…

When there is poor communication in a department, there can be any number of negative outcomes, including errors, productivity declines, dissatisfaction, distrust, lower morale, confusion, absenteeism, and general malaise. In fact, numerous employee surveys have found that myriad problems in any department can be traced back to one primary cause: poor communication.

Growing numbers of managers today understand the importance of getting out of their offices or cubicles and walking around to observe what is going on and visit with the troops. Employees seek and deserve a boss who is open, accessible, and responsive. By having frequent direct contact with your employees, listening to what they say, and having honest two-way communication with them, you are far more likely to be the boss they deserve, respect, and trust. And you are far more likely to identify issues before they become problems, and solve problems before they become crises.

Change the Way Changes Are Introduced

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How would you react if your manager told you that he or she is going to be making some major changes in your job right now? There is no advance notice, no discussion, and none of your inputs.

You would probably react with a combination of resistance, resentment, disappointment, and distress. Importantly, your reaction would be totally normal. And there is no reason to think that your employees will react differently if you spring changes on them.

Keep the Changes

In spite of the fact that bosses do not like to have their own jobs changed without an opportunity to voice their inputs, many still make unilateral changes to their employees' jobs without ever thinking of discussing them, and without ever considering the negative reaction that is surely forthcoming.

Many such bosses abide by a common set of rationalizations for this behavior. Some state something like, "If my employees want to

know more about the changes that are going on here, they'll have plenty of time for that if they become the boss." Others use a father-or-mother-knows-best mentality, taking the approach that the employees would only become confused, sidetracked, overwhelmed, or nervous if involved in the decision-making process, and it is better to simply tell them after the fact and instruct them to live with the changes.

Still other bosses prefer the unilateral approach to implementing change because it is quick and easy. Rather than taking the time to gather employee comments, hold meetings, and discuss options, here is a way to swiftly introduce the changes once and for all. The idea is that the employees will gradually adjust, and those who cannot make the transition can just transition themselves right out the door.

This type of decision-making flies in direct contradiction with what employees want, expect, and deserve at work. Notice also the lack of respect, trust, and communication, along with the cold climate, that accompany this approach. While many bosses proudly proclaim that this method of introducing change is quick, the fact is that it is also quick at introducing problems.

The Mythology of Change

There is a widely held belief that resistance to change is part of human nature. This belief makes it much easier for bosses to act unilaterally when introducing change. After all, because people inherently resist it, why not just implement it and get the adjustment process going?

Is it actually part of human nature to resist change? This is a truism that bosses hold near and dear, and it has a profound impact on the way they manage. The only problem is that this truism is false.

Let's assume that a major change is going to be introduced into your life right at this moment. It is going to dramatically alter your work and may cause an instant job change. It will also redefine your dealings with your family and friends, and you will most likely end up changing where you live as well.

Just nod if you think you would resist this massive change. Are you nodding? That's normal, too. Now, here's the change: You just won a state lottery, and your take is a cool $52 million. That's a major change. Are you going to resist it? Do you still think people resist change?

The fact of the matter is that people do not inherently resist change. What they resist about change is the unknown element. Without any advance information or inputs, they assume the worst.

Therefore, one of the most powerful ways to reduce resistance to change is to remove as much of the unknown as possible. Even if a forthcoming change is going to be upsetting to the employees, it can be handled far more productively if the employees know about it in advance and have an opportunity to talk about it.

Employee Input and Output

The best way to introduce change is to get beyond the point of merely allowing employees to talk about it, and move into the arena where they can actually provide their ideas, inputs, and suggestions. Importantly, this approach is not just another warm and fuzzy step to coddle the team. While there is a warm and fuzzy aspect to it, there are also several solid business reasons for doing so.

Easier acceptance

With employee participation in the decision-making process, the resistance levels drop quickly. When employees play a role in determining and introducing changes, they are far more likely to accept and support them, and to encourage their co-workers to do likewise. Through their involvement in the process, they develop a strong sense of ownership of the changes, along with a vested interest in seeing such changes succeed. Rejecting or resisting the changes is tantamount to rejecting or resisting themselves, and that is something they are not likely to do.

Increased motivation

Researchers continue to find that when employees are given opportunities to take part in the decision-making process, there tends to be a strong positive motivational impact. Many of your employees have strong needs to sense high levels of achievement, self-esteem, and competence. Playing a role in the decision-making process helps them meet these needs.

Increased productivity

When employees are more motivated, there are definite increases in their energy, dedication, and drive. And increases in these areas lead to measurable improvements in their productivity.

It is also important to note that when employees are not given an opportunity to participate in the change process, they tend to feel dissatisfied, distrusted, ignored, distressed, and resentful. These are powerful emotions, and they can easily undermine the employees' motivation and drive, and this will ultimately lead to a drop in their productivity.

Further, two of the most apparent symptoms of employee dissatisfaction are absenteeism and turnover. Because unilateral imposition of change contributes mightily to such dissatisfaction, productivity will suffer further as employees loosen their ties to the company by calling in sick or quitting altogether.

There are even studies showing that when employees are left out of the decision-making process, they can engage in acts of sabotage to make sure that the changes fail and to teach the boss a lesson. Such acts can be extremely costly. The bottom line from the productivity standpoint is that employees tend to engage in counterproductive behaviors when they are excluded from decision-making.

Increased credibility

If you have positioned yourself as a boss who treats employees with respect and trust, and who views employees as key resources, your decision-making style is an opportunity to show that you are a person of your word. It is very easy for a boss to talk about vision, ethics, and values, but when your behavior reflects what you have been saying, you will have taken a major step to build your credibility.

If you have any desire to develop a strong, motivated, dedicated, energized, and committed team, you must be totally credible. Providing your employees with opportunities to participate in the decision-making that affects their work is a powerful way to demonstrate that what you have been saying all along adds up to more than words.

Better decisions

When employees are given an opportunity to present their ideas and suggestions in the decision-making process, the actual decisions tend to be higher quality. In many situations, the employees have a good deal more familiarity with the work situation and the possible impact of changes than the topsiders. So, excluding employees from

decision-making is to exclude a source of valuable inputs, and this makes no business sense at all.

There are countless situations where the employees utter the familiar cry, "If management had only talked to us, they would have never made that mistake." When it comes to introducing change, the biggest mistake is to exclude the employees from the process in the first place.

Change Is in the Air

In terms of the big picture, today's most successful bosses are not only highly receptive to change, they actively encourage and support it. They recognize that if a department is to grow, develop, and thrive, it cannot do so if there is an underlying inflexible current that is resistant to change. They also realize that their department cannot succeed if such changes emanate solely from their own will or whim.

Rather, it is clearly understood that the impetus for change can come from anyone in the department at any time, and all of the employees are regarded as highly valuable sources and resources. It is also understood that the best way to introduce any change is to do so with a great deal of communication and shared ideas.

This does not mean that changes should be made for the sake of doing something different, nor is it based on the erroneous notion that all past procedures, policies, programs, and practices are inherently flawed. Rather, the employees understand that the past is not sacred. If various approaches or strategies have fallen out of date and there are better ways to get the job done, the employees are encouraged to raise the question and to suggest possible answers.

The Birth of a Procedure

There was a young mother who was about to cook a roast. Just prior to putting it in the oven, she cut off both ends of the roast. When her 6-year-old daughter asked her why she cut off the ends, the mother confessed that she did not know, but it's what her mother always did. So, the young mom called her mother and asked her why she did this. Her mother replied that it is what her own mother used to do in the old country. The next call the young mom made was to her grandmother. When she asked her grandmother why she cut the

ends off the roast before putting it in the oven, the grandmother replied, "In the old country, the ovens were very small."

There are many practices and procedures around today that worked perfectly in the past, but have no relevance in today's organizations. And with today's rapidly changing marketplaces, technology, and work environments, a practice that worked just a few years ago can be woefully outdated today. Bosses who still insist that both ends be cut off the roast are going to get burned. And that's exactly what will happen to those bosses who do not realize that employees today want and deserve the opportunity to play an active role in the process of determining and implementing change.

You Lead the Way

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$\mathcal{M}$ost experts agree that one critical attribute for any boss is leadership ability. Without skills in this area, a boss literally and figuratively cannot manage. And yet, many bosses have differing conceptions as to what it means to be an effective leader and how to become one. In fact, many still adhere to the myth that great leaders are born, not made.

The fact is that any boss can build his or her leadership skills and develop into an excellent leader, the kind of leader that your employees deserve. Importantly, the more you know about effective leadership, and the more you practice it, the more likely your employees are going to get what they deserve.

A Defining Moment

Leadership on the job is the process of influencing your employees to meet the agreed-upon objectives. It is important to note that the first component of this definition indicates that leadership is a process. This means that leadership is a constant and ongoing activity,

and not a one-time occurrence in which an employee is directed to do something. That type of approach tends to be coercive, while effective leadership, by its very nature, tends to be cooperative.

Second, as part of the definition, leadership is focused on influencing others to take specific actions. The notion of influencing others implies an approach that relies on interaction, rather than domination.

For some bosses, part of the difficulty in acting like a leader emanates from the word *boss* itself. If you are called a boss, the subtle message is that part of your job is to "boss" your employees around. This means that you dispense a barrage of directives and orders, all laced with a heavy dose of control and insensitivity. In a word, you are the boss, and your employees are the bossed. The best bosses do not abide by this narrow and antiquated notion. Indeed, the best bosses do not boss their employees at all. They lead them.

And, finally, being a leader not only implies specific objectives to be met, but also a state of agreement between the leader and his or her employees on the meaning, timing, and priority of these objectives, as well as on the plans and strategies necessary to meet them.

Power Plays

Behind every leader is some form of power, and it is that power that gives him or her the potential to influence the employees' behavior. As a boss, it is very important to be aware of the power that you have, and to understand the type of power that is most effective in leading your team.

Strictly legitimate

By holding the formal position of boss, you have what is called legitimate power. By virtue of the authority vested in your position, you can dole out assignments, rewards, and punishments, and, as a result, you can certainly influence the behavior of your employees.

However, bosses who rely heavily on legitimate power, such as those who tell their employees to do something "because I said so," are also the bosses who generate higher levels of resistance, dissatisfaction, and counterproductive responses.

Let's get personal

Another sphere of power comes from your own personal characteristics. Perhaps you have tremendous expertise, or maybe you have charisma or a magnetic personality that captivates and enthralls those around you.

In general, the power that you possess as a leader is a combination of your legitimate power and your personal power. Most important, researchers tend to find that bosses who rely less on their titles, authority, and position, and more on their own skills, expertise, and empathy, tend to generate better attitudes and productivity from their staff.

In a word, as a boss, you will not want to rely strictly on your title as the reason why your employees should listen to you. They may be willing to do so over the short term, but over the long term, they will tend to test you, push you, ridicule you, and ultimately reject you.

The other side of the equation

In addition to noting your sources of power as a boss, it is important to never forget that your employees have power, too. By rejecting or accepting your leadership, they will ultimately determine the success of the department, and that will greatly determine your success in the company.

If you ever sense that there is a power crisis with your employees, the first step is to meet with them to discuss what is going on. Some bosses take the instant position that because they hold the legitimate power, they have the authority to squelch dissent whenever they see it. This is merely the "because I said so" approach, and all that it does is incense the employees.

Whenever you have questions about how to deal with your employees in difficult situations, think back to the climate, culture, and vision that you have established, along with the emphasis that you have placed on trust and respect, and you will know exactly what to do. The core of your effectiveness is going to be based on bona fide two-way communication with the team. Your employees do not deserve less than this, nor do you.

Tools for Effective Leadership

Many highly effective leaders practice a number of techniques that truly differentiate them from the rest of the pack. Fortunately,

these techniques are easy to learn, fit directly into a climate of respect and trust, and can be readily incorporated into your leadership mix.

In addition to the steps discussed in earlier chapters, such as expounding your vision, embracing change, being honest, being flexible, and truly listening to the employees, the best leaders also adhere to some or all of the following credo:

Stay in the know

The better leaders devote considerable effort to staying current not only in their fields of technical expertise, but in the field of management as well. They read relevant materials, attend seminars and programs, and adhere to the belief that learning is a lifelong process.

Expect the best

These leaders also set highly positive expectations for themselves and their employees. In fact, there is an entire body of research demonstrating that if a boss expects the employees to succeed, he or she will act in a way that actually increases the likelihood of such success. And, conversely, if the same boss expects the employees to fail, his or her own behavior will actually increase the likelihood of such an outcome.

Dare to share

The most effective leaders are highly oriented to sharing power with their employees. They frequently enrich the employees' jobs by providing them with more discretion, control, and decision-making responsibilities. In addition, they take great pride in seeing their employees learn, develop, and grow.

Opt for optimism

These leaders keep a perpetually upbeat and positive outlook, and because it comes from a topsider, it is often quite contagious. They regard problems as challenges, and they are quick to find the positive side of negative developments. As noted earlier, their orientation is clearly one that replaces the phrase, "It can't be done," with the phrase, "It hasn't been done."

First things first

Highly effective leaders have no qualms about putting the demands of the job and the needs of their team ahead of their own interests and

desires. Their full and unwavering commitment to the project and to the players develops a powerful and energizing sense of loyalty, commitment, and dedication.

Literally leading the way

The great leaders clearly lead by example. It is very easy to talk to your employees about hard work, high quality, or long hours, but the best leaders let their actions do the talking. They rally their team to do battle, and like many courageous leaders from the past, instead of saying, "Charge!" they say, "Follow me!"

Out and about

Excellent leaders also spend a great deal of time in direct contact with their employees. They walk around the work areas and use all of their senses to take in whatever may be going on. They have a great deal of informal contact and communication with their team, and they are highly responsive in dealing with any questions or issues that may be raised. If they cannot answer a question on the spot, they make a note of it and quickly get back to the employee with a response.

The One Best Way to Lead

Although bosses have continued to look for the one best way to lead others, the one answer that continues to emerge is that effective leadership is a contingent process, and the best leadership style depends on several factors. In order to determine the best way to lead, you need to look at the total situation, particularly in terms of your individual employees, the nature of the task, timing, needed resources, and internal and external pressures and demands.

On the one hand, you will probably have some employees who enjoy the safety, structure, and predictability of having key decisions at work made for them. At the same time, you are going to have others who work most effectively when given a high degree of autonomy. A "one size fits all" approach to leading any of these individuals will only lead to dissatisfaction and disruption.

You will also need to analyze each situation quite carefully. For example, a highly communicative and participative leadership style can work very well in many cases and with many employees, particularly if

the company is successfully sailing along. At the same time, if the ship is sinking and there are critical and urgent decisions to be made, this is probably not the best time for extensive group meetings and lengthy discussions.

The most effective leaders have a balanced menu of leadership strategies that they can apply, all depending upon the specifics of the situation. In some cases, they will need to make decisions themselves and merely inform the employees. Other decisions can be discussed with the employees along the way, while still others may be based on employee inputs or actually be made in their entirety by the employees.

As a boss who is seeking to be an effective leader, a key part of your job is to understand as much as possible about your individual employees and the specific situations that call for your leadership. Armed with such insight, you can then select the leadership approach that has the greatest likelihood of generating a positive and well-deserved outcome for your employees, your department, your organization, and yourself.

Chapter 9

Let's Get Motivation

$\mathcal{J}$ust about any boss will tell you how important it is to know how to motivate employees, and most bosses have pet theories about the best ways to do so. The only problem is that although motivational theories have abounded for years, many have recently fallen by the wayside. Yet there are still bosses who cling to the fads and adages of the past, only to be left in bewilderment when they find that their employees respond with little more than a yawn.

In order to be the boss your employees deserve, it is important to have a clear understanding of what motivation really means, as well as to have a solid inventory of proven motivational techniques and practices.

The Meaning of Motivation

Motivation is the process that energizes, focuses, and sustains a person's behavior. Looking briefly at each element in the process, the energizing component is the jump start that pushes an individual into action. This is the point where a person takes the first step toward

getting what he or she wants or needs. This is usually caused by sensing an unmet need or want and believing that certain actions will fulfill it.

In terms of focus, the person concentrates his or her behavior on a particular goal. Highly motivated individuals tend to have a clear picture of that goal, and they behave accordingly, while lesser-motivated individuals typically have foggier ideas in this area, and this is reflected in their behavior.

From the standpoint of sustaining the person's behavior, the more the individual is motivated to meet a particular goal, the more he or she will keep pursuing it. And if there are obstacles in the way, the highly motivated individual will go over, under, through, or around them, while the less motivated is more likely to feel blocked and move in an entirely different direction.

Out with the Old

It was not that long ago that bosses were waxing eloquent about the way in which "need hierarchies" are the ultimate in motivating employees. Just find where the employees are on the hierarchy, take care of the unfilled needs, and they will be on their way.

However, many of these polished theories lost their glow when studied under the vigilant eyes of behavioral science researchers. The notion that all of your employees have the same hierarchy of needs and move in the exact same way from one stipulated higher need to another was simply unfounded.

What remains of these theories today is the original premise that people will strive to fill basic survival and safety needs before they set out to fill higher psychological needs. For example, if your employees are highly concerned about being terminated or laid off, which means that their security needs are not being met, they are not going to be very interested in or motivated by your new Employee of the Month program.

However, once their basic needs are satisfied, such as when they sense some job security, they will then set out to fill their so-called higher-level needs. These will vary from one employee to the next, and can include needs for power, recognition, social interaction, competence, esteem, personal growth, achievement, advancement, or control, to name just a few. This means that a motivational approach that

works perfectly with some of your employees may have absolutely no impact on others.

It's an Individual Matter

The greatest leap in the area of employee motivation is the increased importance of understanding your individual employees. Rather than taking a "one size fits all" approach to motivation, the best bosses are focusing on their employees' individual needs, drives, and goals.

They do this by careful observation, communication, and a great deal of listening. Armed with this insight into their employees, motivating them is far easier. These bosses understand the motivational effect of structuring an employee's work in a way that links fulfillment of his or her needs with attainment of the established goals.

In this way, if you have determined that one of your employees has a strong need for recognition and appreciation, you would make sure that this employee understands that when he or she successfully completes the project in question, there will be recognition and appreciation aplenty.

Another employee who is working on a similar project may have minimal needs for recognition, so any promise of recognition for a job well done is going to have a minimal motivational impact, if any at all. However, if this same employee has strong control needs, then the project should be laced with numerous opportunities for individual decision-making, monitoring, and self-correction.

As a result, although you may have read about a whiz-bang motivational program that worked extremely well in a department or company similar to yours, there is no reason to assume that it will have any such impact with your employees. In fact, it is even possible that such a program could generate some dissatisfaction and ill will.

Motivational Approaches That Still Work

Although many ideas, notions, and programs regarding employee motivation have dropped by the wayside, there are still some motivational techniques that can be applied successfully in most work settings. However, even for these programs to be fully effective, it will be important for you to have a good deal of insight into your employees as individuals.

It's a goal

One of the more effective ways to motivate many of your employees continues to be the establishment of clear, specific, and prioritized goals. In a word, when employees have clear targets in sight, they are far more likely to be motivated to hit them.

Looking briefly at the goals themselves, it is important to note that goals that are too easy to reach are often not motivational at all, because the employees sense minimal satisfaction in reaching them. On the other side of the coin, goals that are virtually impossible to meet are often equally demotivating.

As a boss, there are actually two key steps to keep in mind in the goal-setting process. The first is that for most employees, goals that are quite challenging yet attainable tend to have a positive motivational impact. Second, when employees have the opportunity to participate in establishing their goals, they tend to be more highly motivated to achieve them. Through their participation, they tend to have a stronger sense of ownership in the actual goals, and reaching them takes on increased personal significance.

Incorporate the incentives

Another highly effective method of motivating many employees is by attaching incentives to the desired performance. Although incentives can come in many forms, one of the most popular is monetary.

With pay incentives, the idea is to jointly establish some goals with your employees, a step that is motivational in and of itself, and then attach some monetary rewards to the attainment of these goals. Research is very clear in this area: When pay incentives or bonuses are attached to performance, the most common outcome is increased productivity. These incentives can come in many sizes, shapes, and forms, including individual bonuses, team bonuses, merit pay, piece rate, and commissions.

At the same time, because there are all sorts of additional incentives that can have a powerful motivational impact, you do not need to limit yourself to the monetary approach. Other incentives can include prizes, movies, dinners, gift certificates, or even preferred parking. Importantly, if you want to increase the likelihood that a particular performance incentive will actually motivate an employee, you will need to select incentives that are personally meaningful to him or her.

It is also important to implement a motivational program that is regarded as fair, balanced, and truly functional. For example, a boss who was trying to improve safety felt that a contest just might do the trick. After all, there is no question that contests can have a highly motivational impact on many of the players. However, this boss's approach was to take all of the employees who had no accidents during a specific period and put all of their names in a drawing for a few nice prizes.

The only problem was that instead of being given a guaranteed incentive for their safe performance, the employees were actually only being given the possibility of receiving an incentive. When the employees realized what was happening, the motivational impact of the program dropped to zero. In fact, it even generated some dissatisfaction, with some employees grumbling that if the boss wants to reward safety, then that is what should be rewarded, rather than resorting to some cheap game that holds down the number of prizes.

An enriching approach

Another approach that continues to have a positive motivational impact for a good number of employees is job enrichment. As a boss, you can enrich your employees' jobs by making sure that their work utilizes a variety of their skills and provides them with increased responsibility, decision-making, and discretion, along with the opportunity to review and correct what they have done. In addition, job enrichment also calls for work to be a complete unit, rather than a small part of a larger project.

For many employees, this kind of involvement, participation, and control not only meets their needs for achievement and accomplishment, but also satisfies some of their needs for personal growth and development. As a result, while job enrichment may not be motivational for everyone, such as for employees who have strong needs for structure and security, it satisfies a broad enough range of motivators to be worthy of consideration for many of your employees.

Interestingly enough, while job enrichment programs have been linked to increased productivity, there has been an even stronger relationship between these programs and increased quality. And further, these programs have been linked to a reduction in absenteeism and turnover.

More Than Motivation

It is easy for bosses to become overly consumed with the idea of motivating their employees, and this can cause them to overlook several related factors that are just as important as motivation. For example, through your insights and observational skills, you may have a very clear idea of exactly what motivates a particular employee. But what happens when you then lay out the ideal opportunity for him or her to fulfill those needs, but he or she does nothing?

At such a point, it is easy to conclude that he or she is "just not motivated." However, that might not be the case at all. Your employee may be highly motivated, but may lack the skills, abilities, expertise, or other characteristics that are needed to carry out the task. In this way, what appears to be a lack of motivation may actually be a lack of training.

This further demonstrates the importance of understanding your employees as individuals, not only in terms of their motivations, but in terms of their skills, interests, expertise, and expectations.

Taking the Heat

It is important for a boss to be on the lookout for any factors that might be preventing the employees from being motivated. This includes inequitable pay systems, benefit packages that are woefully out of touch, or harsh working conditions. These are environmental factors that can prevent any motivational program from working.

For example, a convalescent care center had a kitchen that was so hot that the employees could hardly work. Because of this assault on their physical needs, there was no way they could be interested in fulfilling some higher-level needs, such as their needs for recognition. The center had a recognition program, but it was thoroughly ignored. After all, who wants recognition when stuck to a chair? In fact, some of the employees became so dissatisfied that they quit, literally following the adage that if you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen.

When the air conditioning was repaired, employee motivation increased dramatically. However, air conditioning alone does not motivate anyone. By cooling off a hot area, whether literally in terms of a hot kitchen, or figuratively by correcting a poor pay policy or outdated

benefits, all a boss is doing is removing a major source of dissatisfaction that is preventing the employees from even thinking about trying to fulfill any of their higher-level needs. Once these dissatisfying elements are removed, then the employees are far more likely to respond to higher-level motivational programs.

This is where your understanding of your employees as individuals is so important. With that insight, you can remove the motivational blocks in the work environment and then implement a range of motivational programs to tap the various remaining needs of your employees, whether focused on recognition, achievement, self-esteem, control, or autonomy. This type of insight into the process of motivation, as well as into your employees as individuals, is precisely what your employees seek and deserve in a job and from a boss.

Chapter 10

Recognizing the Importance of Recognition

Providing your employees with thanks, credit, and appreciation when merited by their performance is an easy, economical, and quick way to improve their attitudes, morale, self-esteem, confidence, loyalty, and even productivity. The vast majority of employees today genuinely enjoy receiving positive feedback from their boss, and they typically sense profound disappointment and dissatisfaction when it is missing.

Recognition for performance obviously comes in many forms, ranging from a few words of praise all the way to awards that can be as elaborate as one can imagine. Interestingly, for many employees, the psychological lift that comes from receiving an award, no matter what that award may be, is often more gratifying than the award itself.

Either way, the impact of recognition is long-lasting. In fact, if you were to list the five most personally satisfying work experiences in your entire career, at least one is guaranteed to be some form of recognition you received from a significant other in your workplace.

Although providing well-deserved recognition to the employees is one of the best deals in management, some bosses claim that they lack

the time to do it, while others rationalize that their employees are not babies, and if they need so much stroking, perhaps they should work elsewhere. Ironically, many studies have found that the lack of recognition can actually cause employees to do just that. When employees are asked about reasons for changing jobs, one of the most common responses typically focuses on the lack of recognition from a previous boss.

Other Than the Obvious

In addition to the fact that recognition tends to improve attitudes, satisfaction, and performance, there are other equally compelling but less obvious reasons for bosses to go the extra mile in the recognition arena.

It's contagious

When one employee receives recognition from the boss, whether on a ceremonious or spontaneous basis, it is viewed longingly by all. The result is that many employees consciously or unconsciously tell themselves that they would sure like to receive that type of attention, and now they know how to perform in order to get it.

As employees see their co-workers singled out for recognition, their own behavior is often better energized and focused on the very actions that the boss is seeking. The employees who originally received the recognition are not only credible models, but also living proof that good things happen to those who engage in such behaviors as providing great service, showing exemplary teamwork, coming up with creative ideas, demonstrating remarkable improvement, or making an outstanding effort.

More than fair

When you have a climate and set of values premised in great part on fairness and equitable treatment, providing employees with recognition when merited by their performance is a key way to show that these values are more than mere words. After all, when employees work diligently and meet or surpass the objectives, it is only fair that their accomplishments be recognized.

Beyond the issue of fairness, providing your employees with recognition also demonstrates your respect for them, your trust in them,

and your genuine interest in their success, accomplishments, and growth. In this way, recognition also helps foster the warm, communicative, and supportive work atmosphere that employees have come to expect and deserve today.

More of the same

When you provide employees with recognition for their successes, you are technically providing them with positive reinforcement. And because people tend to repeat behaviors that are rewarded, recognition greatly increases the likelihood of seeing more of those positive behaviors.

In a broader sense, this means that providing your employees with recognition helps energize them to continue meeting their goals, and this ultimately helps the department meet its goals. At the same time, when employees are not given recognition for their accomplishments, it is technically a lack of reinforcement. And behaviors that are neither rewarded nor recognized are not likely to be repeated.

A learning experience

Providing the employees with feedback on their performance is also one of the most important ways to facilitate the learning process. When employees receive recognition for various aspects of their performance, they are likely to internalize and build on the behaviors that led to this reinforcement. As part of this process, the employees also learn that the behaviors that were not rewarded are to be avoided.

While learning is often conceived of in terms of rewards and punishments, a great deal of learning can be handled by rewards only. People will learn and repeat the rewarded behaviors, while the lack of rewards for ineffective behaviors is often sufficient negative feedback to cause that behavior to be extinguished. Looked at in this light, the problem with an overall lack of recognition is that it actually causes some highly productive behaviors to be eliminated.

It is even more remarkable to note that many employees who receive practically no positive reinforcement are instantly blasted even if they make the most minuscule error. When bosses engage in this type of feedback, they completely undercut any effort to build respect, trust, fairness, commitment, support, self-esteem, and productivity. And from the learning standpoint, all that the employees have

learned is that their performance, productivity, and accomplishments mean nothing.

Some Pre-launch Planning

There is an entire continuum of recognition that you can provide to your employees, ranging from informal and spontaneous comments to a highly structured program that follows a predetermined range of awards.

Either way, it is important to think carefully about the kind of recognition that best suits your employees and the nature of their work. And further, you will need to consider the kinds of performance that you wish to reward, the kinds of recognition and rewards to be provided, and what the recognition says about you and your company.

After all, it is possible for a reward to be totally inappropriate for a given performance. Rewards that are perceived as meaningless or minimal can easily undercut all the benefits that typically accompany recognition programs. Interestingly enough, rewards that are excessive can have an equally questionable outcome, as many employees can become rather uncomfortable if they sense that they are being over-rewarded for their performance.

By having a good deal of insight into your employees as individuals, particularly in terms of their skills, interests, abilities, and expectations, you can start to tailor a recognition program that fits their needs. And by combining this insight with your understanding of the nature of their jobs, such as in terms of the autonomy, interdependence, and structure, you can then fashion some recognition strategies that are likely to have a truly meaningful impact.

One important way to help determine some of the best recognition strategies for your employees is to ask them. This approach instantly provides your team with positive feedback, as their involvement in determining some of the modes of recognition is a form of recognition in and of itself. And by involving your employees in the process, you are recognizing their competence, creativity, and commitment. In addition, the recognition that your employees receive in the future will have an even greater impact because they have played a role in determining it.

On the Informal Side

Informal recognition is typically a spontaneous and upbeat way of letting your employees literally see and hear how much you appreciate what they have been doing. This type of recognition is often as cheap as can be, because it can be as simple as a few kind words of thanks.

Such recognition is best received when provided as close to the positive behavior as possible. And further, its impact can be even greater when provided in front of the rest of the team. If this is not possible or feasible, you should try to make sure that the rest of the team hears about it.

A few words

Sometimes the most effective, meaningful, and memorable form of recognition is just a matter of telling your employee that he or she has done a terrific job. In many cases, as the boss, you are the most important person your employees know, and words of thanks from you have a compelling and lasting impact.

Your words of recognition and appreciation obviously have a tremendous impact when delivered face-to-face to one of your employees. At the same time, there can be some value in varying the method you use to provide such feedback.

For example, you can provide your employees with some highly appreciative words through voice mail and e-mail. You can even use the traditional approach and write a letter, note, or memo of appreciation, or send the employee a card that reflects a high degree of recognition and appreciation. You can also select messages or cards of appreciation from various Web sites and e-mail them to your highly deserving employees. With today's technology, you also have the option of printing up a certificate of appreciation. No matter which option you choose, this type of recognition tends to have a powerful and enduring impact on your employees.

More tangible thanks

In addition to giving your employees the praise and appreciation that they have merited, there are other related steps that can make the feedback even more effective. For example, some bosses have had

great success giving out small cash bonuses, under the upbeat premise of catching their employees doing something very well.

Other on-the-spot bonuses can include meal vouchers, gift certificates, movie passes, pins, discount coupons, redeemable merchandise awards, and tickets to movies, plays, museums, amusement parks, and local events. However, this is but a small sampling of the kinds of tangible thanks that you can provide, and your employees can certainly help you build the list.

Picture this

There are many easy ways to literally let your employees see the recognition that you are giving them. These can include placing their photos on bulletin boards, in the company newsletter, and in a scrapbook in the lobby, to name just a few.

A growing number of companies are also putting photos of their employees on their Web site or Intranet site as a further way of offering thanks, appreciation, and congratulations for a job well done.

Food for thought

Many of the most successful bosses use all sorts of spontaneous eating opportunities to provide recognition to their employees. At the end of a hard day or hard week, one way to recognize the effort and accomplishments of the team can be as basic as bringing in some pizza and soft drinks.

Importantly, this does not mean having the food thrown on a table, accompanied by an announcement telling the employees to come and get it. Rather, this should all be done with some ceremony and sizzle. You can gather the employees together and tell them that you greatly appreciate the job that they have been doing, and this is just one small way to say thanks.

Depending upon the interests and tastes of your employees, there are all sorts of additional dietary delights that you can use to further recognize your employees' accomplishments. These typically include cookies, candies, fruits, health-oriented snacks, meal coupons, ice cream socials, holiday parties, picnics, or taking the employees to lunch or dinner at a favorite dining spot.

Of special significance

Some bosses develop their own recognition awards just for the employees in their department. These awards have no particular value outside of the department, and some can even be fairly outrageous, but they take on a tremendous value within the department.

For example, when employees do a particularly great job on a departmental project or activity, they may get to adorn their desk for a week with the special "green cup," "platinum paper clip," or any other special recognition item that holds psychological value within the department. These items are often presented with great pomp, circumstance, and fun. They typically become an important part of a department's culture, and employees work diligently to earn these awards and display them with pride.

Formal Programs

In addition to the informal and often spontaneous forms of recognition that you can provide, there are numerous formal recognition programs that also have a compelling impact on employee attitudes, motivation, and performance.

These programs typically spell out the kinds of behaviors that are sought and outcomes that are desired, and also give the employees a clear idea of the rewards that can be earned if the expectations are met.

In the earliest days of recognition, most of these programs were premised upon employee tenure with a given company. These were the days when five years of employment could earn an employee a pin or a pen, and 35 years could bring him or her a gold watch. There is no doubt that there have been many changes not only in employee attitudes toward long-term tenure, but also in terms of company attitudes toward formal recognition programs.

Today's programs

Make no mistake, there continue to be serious recognition programs linked to employee tenure. In fact, some of these programs still start with pins and pens, and then work their way through watches and beyond. However, even these programs have changed, as the awards for substantial tenure often extend far beyond the gold watch. In fact, they can even extend far beyond the workplace, with some

companies going so far as to provide their long-termers with around-the-world trips.

Perhaps the biggest change in recognition programs is the expanded range of areas in which such programs are now found. Starting on a company-wide basis, there can be recognition programs based on over-all performance in such areas as profit, growth, market share, and reduced worker's compensation claims, to name just a few.

At the same time, there has also been tremendous growth in the number and breadth of recognition programs specific to individual divisions and departments. In this regard, there can be substantial awards associated with such diverse outcomes as increased produc-tivity, safety, work quality, sales quotas, customer satisfaction, num-bers of employees trained and certified, volunteer work in the community, and savings associated with employee suggestions. At the same time, there can be substantial awards associated with reductions in such diverse areas as injury claims, customer complaints, absentee-ism, theft, turnover, and accounts receivable.

Not only are there recognition programs based on specific and measurable performance criteria, there are also programs based on more qualitative aspects of behavior. Such programs can look at the overall behavior of employees, including a combination of attitudes, teamwork, cooperation, personal development, work quality and quan-tity, work beyond the call of duty, and then award an employee with the title of Employee of the Month. This typically includes a certifi-cate or a plaque, several photo opportunities, and even some cash, coupons, or merchandise.

If there is an overall trend, it is the movement to attach recogni-tion and rewards to the key individual, departmental, and organiza-tional areas in which specific and measurable improvements are desired. And there is one main reason behind the growth of these programs: They work.

About those awards

In determining the actual awards program, be sure to take a care-ful look at your style, objectives, budget, and employee inputs, as well as the precedent you are setting and the message you are sending. With this in mind, formal recognition programs can provide just about any award, such as customized or generic buttons, ribbons, paste-on

messages, pins, pens, plaques, trophies, apparel, jewelry, ceramics, artwork, crystal and silver designs, glassware, sporting goods, luggage, electronics, watches, small clocks, grandfather clocks, desk accessories, desks, and much more.

There is also a broad range of travel-related awards that you can consider providing to your employees. These can include travel coupons and discounts, hotel weekends, air travel, cruises, rental cars, and even major trips.

At the same time, you can also opt to provide your employees with awards that are more work-related, such as preferred parking, an afternoon off with pay, dinner with you, longer breaks or lunch periods, free use of a fancy car for a month, free meals and transportation home for employees who work late, induction into a special company "hall of fame" or similar prestigious grouping, contribution to a charity in the employee's name, or even a more prestigious title.

The award business

Today, there is an entire industry dedicated to developing and marketing awards for your employees. Many firms in this industry can be accessed online, and they offer a vast array of customized and generic awards for your employees. All you need to do is go to any search engine and enter the words, "employee recognition gifts," and a vast array of companies offering countless employee gifts and gift options will be but one click away.

Some of these companies even operate with an interesting wrinkle on the theme of employee involvement in determining recognition awards. Through such companies, your employees receive recognition points from you, and they can then redeem these points for merchandise available online from these awards companies. As for the awards themselves, the sky literally is the limit, as air travel is but one of the many available awards.

What about cash?

Money is certainly an award that can be used in recognition programs, such as in the case of spot bonuses noted earlier. And, obviously, cash plays a vital role in a company's incentive programs, as these programs are part of the overall pay system. However, there is a

real movement away from using cash awards as part of a recognition program.

One of the main reasons for this movement is that cash lacks the psychological value that comes with non-cash awards. For example, when an employee is given a trophy, jewelry, or any other specific recognition award, it is easy for him or her to look directly at it months later and still sense the pride, achievement, reinforcement, and joy at having received it in the first place. On the other hand, cash tends to be spent on some passing item, thus leaving a cash award with minimal psychological shelf life.

In addition, when employees are provided cash recognition awards, it is not uncommon to find that they view these awards as part of their pay, and even as something they can plan on receiving every year. This automatically dilutes the impact of such awards on motivation and performance. And those employees who fail to merit such awards in future years sense that their pay has been cut, and this can be a major source of dissatisfaction.

The awards ceremony

One important aspect of a formal recognition program is to ceremonialize the presentation of the awards. Depending upon the program itself, this can be accomplished in departmental meetings, dinners, picnics, special recognition gatherings, or even at a formal banquet.

By presenting the awards in front of others, the event is more memorable and satisfying for the recipients, and can actually be motivating and uplifting for the rest of the staff as well. If the awards just happen to show up in the mail or in a company pouch, a large piece of the impact is lost. For your employees, the award is clearly the steak, but the presentation is the sizzle.

Recognizing the Bigger Picture

Providing employees with recognition is a natural part of a work environment that is premised on respect, trust, openness, ethics, warmth, and support. In fact, in order to continue to build this type of atmosphere, recognition actually becomes an integral element.

As a result, it is important to continuously seek out ways in which you can provide your employees with recognition. However, this does

not mean that you should do so simply for the sake of saying some-thing positive or giving the employee a gift. Constant recognition ulti-mately becomes as motivational and energizing as background noise. The recognition you provide should be reserved for employee perfor-mance that merits special attention.

After all, if you are truly striving to be the boss your employees deserve, you should provide your employees with the recognition they deserve.

Section Three:
Everyday Roles and Responsibilities

As a boss, you are going play a variety of roles during any given day. Among the most common and important are your roles and responsibilities associated with hiring new staff, orienting them, setting goals, evaluating performance, providing training and coaching, and conducting meetings. Many bosses grind their way through these responsibilities and end up making more work for themselves and their employees. This certainly is not what the employees deserve in a boss.

It is obvious that any of these roles can consume huge amounts of your time. If your tools in these areas are a little rusty, you will end up spending countless hours handling each responsibility, followed by more hours to correct the problems that arise as a result.

Fortunately, there have been numerous new developments that impact each of these roles and responsibilities. For example, while many bosses struggle with the logistics of planning and running a meeting, a rapidly growing number are relying on virtual meetings, complete with real-time interaction among the participants. Not long ago, this was regarded as virtually impossible. By having an increased understanding of the changes that are taking place in all of these areas, it will not be a giant leap for you to handle these responsibilities more expeditiously, effectively, and productively.

And that means that it will not be a giant leap for you to move that much closer to being the boss your employees deserve.

Chapter 11

Ready, Aim, Hire!

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$\mathcal{T}$here is no way to be the boss that your employees deserve if you have less than state-of-the-art skills in hiring new personnel. When a boss has marginal hiring skills, the outcome is unfair to everyone.

In the first place, it is not fair for applicants to be either rejected for jobs that are right for them or hired for jobs that are wrong for them. And further, it is not fair to existing employees for solid applicants to be rejected and marginal applicants to be hired. In terms of the larger picture, none of this is fair to the department itself or the company at large.

Poor hiring decisions typically lead to more work for your staff, more errors, more disruptions, more dissatisfaction, and more turnover. When your employees are making a full effort to be productive and meet the established objectives, they deserve a boss who is doing likewise in carrying out all of his or her managerial functions, especially when it comes to adding new staff.

Many bosses believe they can wing it through the hiring process, particularly when armed with a few pet questions and an inflated

opinion of their ability to judge others. This mind-set not only overlooks the fact that most of the steps in the hiring process can be quickly and easily learned, but also overlooks the tremendous costs associated with outmoded hiring techniques.

Paying the Price

In the first place, there is a very steep price tag attached to the countless hours wasted as a result of poor screening and hiring practices. Bosses with marginal hiring skills tend to spend far too much time with unqualified applicants, and then spend even more time literally and figuratively cleaning up the damage these new hires cause on the job.

And further, there are substantial costs associated with losing qualified applicants. For example, when a qualified applicant is turned away because of poor hiring techniques, the company loses a potentially productive employee, and may well hire an individual who produces little more than trouble. At the same time, that rejected employee can easily become an emperor of bad will in the community. And further, some highly qualified applicants may withdraw themselves from the hiring process at a particular company as a result of the questionable way they are being treated. In all cases, the company loses.

Then there is a massive universe of legal costs for the companies that ignore equal employment opportunity considerations during the screening and hiring process. Claims in this area can easily reach six figures, and many reach the press as well.

Yet another set of costs that result from poor hiring practices is the money that is forced down the drain by orienting and training employees who should have never been brought on board in the first place. These employees tend to find the exit quickly, or it finds them. Either way, the process of bringing unqualified employees onto the payroll, and then getting them off, burns up even more time and money. In a word, when bosses hire by the seat of the pants, they ultimately end up with a kick in the pants.

First Things First

When it's time to fill a position, some bosses jump right into their screening mode without doing anything that even resembles analyzing,

preparing, and planning. This makes about as much sense as rushing out and buying an airplane when you actually need a rowboat.

Take this job and analyze it

Before interviewing any applicants, the first step is to spend a little time trying to understand the job itself. This means far more than merely looking at the job description, because many jobs are actually quite different from whatever may be stipulated in their job description. In addition, a job description that may have been perfect as recently as a year ago may be useless now.

Some of the methods that can help you get a better handle on the real responsibilities within a job are through careful observation, meeting with the individual or individuals who hold the job, having these jobholders specifically describe what they do during a given work period, or having each of them complete a brief questionnaire.

Specification, not speculation

Once you have a clear understanding of a job's actual responsibilities, priorities, and expectations, your next step is to delineate the job specifications. The specifications refer to any skills, expertise, education, certificates, licenses, and experience that are necessary for an individual to perform successfully in the job itself.

Many companies can run into equal employment opportunity problems when they have outdated or unrealistic job specifications. For example, a company may traditionally require the holders of a given job to have two years of college, while the actual responsibilities have nothing to do with such education. In fact, some could claim that the educational requirement is little more than an artificial barrier to exclude various racial or ethnic groups from employment. Specifications that have no significant relationship to performance on the job not only exclude individuals who may well be excellent employees, but also raise the specter of serious legal exposure.

All of the qualifications you establish for a job should be what are called *bona fide occupational qualifications*, which means that each one is truly essential in order to perform the job successfully. If a job specification is not a business necessity, then you should make it your business to eliminate it.

In addition, don't be afraid to have some flexibility in this area, as it may be impossible to find a candidate who fully meets every specification. Look carefully at each applicant's skill mix, as many companies today are finding more success by building jobs around people, rather than trying to force-fit people into jobs.

Fitting job descriptions

Once you have completed the job analysis and established the job specifications, you are then ready to put together a realistic job description. It can be as detailed as you would like, and it should clearly describe the key activities, standards, and priorities of the job, along with any relevant information that can impact the work or working conditions.

Casting the Nets Wide

You may or may not be directly involved in the recruitment process. But either way, there are some important points to remember if you truly want to attract some viable candidates. First, it is important to use recruiting mechanisms that span far beyond a local search. This can help increase the likelihood of finding the very candidate or candidates that you are seeking, and it also helps demonstrate your commitment to equal employment opportunity.

Second, there is no one best recruitment technique. Rather, it is important to make sure that whoever is doing the recruiting is open to using an array of recruitment strategies, including the Internet, newspapers, trade magazines, universities, trade schools, state employment services, employment agencies, and executive search firms.

Do not forget that your present employees are an excellent source of potential employees. In this regard, many companies have had tremendous success with incentive programs that provide employees with cash bonuses for such referrals, with an additional kicker if the referred employee remains on board for a stipulated period of time.

What to Say to a Resume

In many cases, a resume is going to be your first contact with an applicant. Today's resumes can be hard copies or they can be electronic. Either way, many bosses tend to quickly scan them, look for a

few high points, and then decide whether to proceed. This is a huge mistake.

There are a number of key steps to take with a resume that will help you screen the applicant as well as identify areas in which you may want to ask additional questions. The first point to remember is that a resume is an advertisement, and the applicant is now trying to convince you to buy the labor that he or she is selling.

If the resume has spelling or grammatical errors, if it is difficult to read, or if it is just plain sloppy, that tells you a great deal about this applicant. After all, if this is the quality of the applicant's work when he or she is trying to impress you, just imagine how it will look when under the daily pressures of the job itself.

In addition to looking over the actual appearance of the resume, you should also look at several key content areas. In the first place, you should review the applicant's work experiences, job progress, job titles, and education and training to make sure that he or she meets the job specifications.

At the same time, try to look for some patterns. Does the applicant's career path appear to be continuously moving ahead, or has he or she plateaued or even started a descent? It is also important to look for any gaps in the work history, as those will have to be explained if you decide to go ahead with an interview.

You should also be on the lookout for cover-ups, as illustrated by an applicant who indicates that she was Marketing Manager from 1998–2000. This can mean three full years, namely January, 1998 through December, 2000. Or, it can mean a shade more than one year, namely December, 1998 until January, 2000.

It is also helpful to watch for any inconsistencies in the resume, such as one section that indicates that the applicant was attending UCLA during a given period, while another section indicates that he or she was working in Boston at the same time. Although this is possible with today's telecommuting and online educational opportunities, you will need to find out how this applicant did it.

By spending a couple of minutes reviewing a resume, you may be able to equitably eliminate some candidates who are clearly unqualified, while also identifying some key areas that may need some additional probing when interviewing the better candidates.

In terms of the big picture, the idea is for you to try to spend more time with the applicants whose skills, abilities, expertise, and experience are better suited for the position under consideration, while spending less time with the applicants who are not as well suited for the job. An extra minute or two with the resume can definitely help you do this.

An Inner View of the Interview

As soon as you meet an applicant, you start making judgments. The only problem is that snap judgments tend to be wrong.

You might take an instant liking or disliking to an applicant for any number of questionable reasons. Perhaps an applicant unconsciously reminds you of someone you knew in the past. Or maybe you have fallen into a stereotypical trap and believe in some of the old adages about human behavior. For example, some bosses still believe that a weak handshake is a sign of weak character, and applicants who will not look you in the eye are dishonest. This kind of thinking is a wonderful way to lose some potentially excellent employees.

When you feel yourself making instant positive or negative judgments about an applicant, the best move is to set these opinions aside and continue the interview. Of course, this assumes that you have an understanding of the best way to interview an applicant in the first place.

Predicting the future

In a job interview, your objective is to make an accurate prediction about the future behavior of the applicant. While this sounds like a daunting task, you are actually predicting human behavior all the time. For example, if you are thinking about assigning a highly detailed project to one of two employees, you will most likely look at the way that each has handled similar projects in the past and make your decision based on that. The same approach applies to a job interview.

What a person will do on the job can be predicted in great part by what he or she has done in the past. People who are persistent, energetic, industrious, sociable, optimistic, or high-achieving do not become that way over night. Rather, these character traits and many others develop over many years and typically remain quite stable over a person's lifetime.

An applicant may eloquently verbalize that he or she is an energetic high-achiever, but if these traits are not found in his or her work history, they are not going to be found in the history that he or she will be making with your company either.

Framing the Interview

The best way to get a clear picture of an applicant's past behavior is to conduct an interview that is actually a journey along the applicant's career path. In fact, there are several important reasons for taking this biographical route.

In the first place, as noted earlier, the more you learn about what the applicant has done on previous jobs, the better your ability to predict his or her future work behavior.

Second, in order to conduct an interview that stays within the law, your questions need to be job-related. Importantly, if any of your questions are not associated with the job, do not ask them. This includes any questions that focus on race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, sexual preference, or disabilities.

Looking briefly at the issue of disabilities, employers are not allowed to discriminate against an applicant because of his or her disability. If the individual is qualified to do the work, or able to do so with a reasonable accommodation by your company, then the applicant must be treated the same as all others.

Another reason to stick with job-related questions is that questions that are unrelated to the job are of no predictive value at all. For example, many bosses like to ask about an applicant's marital status. In the first place, that's an unlawful pre-employment inquiry. Second, marital status has no predictive value in terms of future work behavior. And further, not only is that an illegal and useless question, it is also an annoying question that is quite likely to upset the applicant. And one of the best ways to lose highly qualified applicants is to bombard them with personal questions.

What should you ask?

You can ask any job-related questions you would like, including myriad inquiries about an applicant's work experience, expertise, training and education, and career goals.

The best way to proceed is to open the interview with some basic pleasantries, and then start the formal process by moving through the applicant's work history, beginning with the earliest jobs and continuing through the present. This approach provides a clear track for the interview while generating fair, predictive, job-related information that is organized in a way to help you compare one applicant with another.

As you move from job to job, your questions should focus on starting and ending dates, key responsibilities, what the applicant liked and disliked about the job, and why the applicant left. When people describe their likes and dislikes, they are also describing some of their key motivations, and this can be very valuable information when matching applicants to the position you are trying to fill.

You can certainly ask questions about leadership responsibilities, challenging projects, major successes and failures, work-related strengths and weaknesses, and any training or education that the applicant may have received.

In addition, you can ask any number of competence-based questions that relate to the job. For example, you can ask the applicant how he or she handled various projects, challenges, and pressure situations, as well as questions regarding any relevant technical information.

You can add work-sample or hypothetical questions from the position under consideration, such as questions that start with, "In this job, there can be a high degree of X. How would you handle it?" Or, "What would you do if Y happened?"

As part of your questioning, be sure to ask about any concerns that may have been raised in your review of the applicant's resume, such as any unexplained gaps in the work record.

Through this process, you are trying to accurately answer two questions:

1. Can the applicant do the job?
2. Will the applicant do the job?

In terms of the first question, the issue is whether the applicant has the expertise, skills, training, and experience. This question can typically be answered by looking carefully at his or her resume and then asking some competency questions in the interview.

In order to determine whether the applicant will do the job, you need to gain some insight into his or her drive, energy, persistence,

interpersonal skills, and other character traits that are needed for success in the position. The best way to do this is by conducting a thorough work history, as the presence or lack of these character traits is written all over a person's career.

As the applicant describes his or her work experiences, be sure to take notes. Not only does this help the applicant feel that what he or she is saying is important, but it also helps you remember important points when you compare applicants at a later date. In addition, your notes may help you if there is a subsequent legal claim, because they will clearly demonstrate that you conducted a totally job-related interview. If the applicant happens to spontaneously mention some non-job-related information along the way, you would be well-advised not to write it down.

How should you ask?

A job interview is not an interrogation. It is a friendly conversation from beginning to end. To help keep the dialogue moving, it is always helpful to use many open-ended questions, rather than questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."

For example, notice the difference between a question that asks, "Did you enjoy the work?" as opposed to a question that asks, "What did you like about the work?" With the open-ended approach, the applicant is going to do some talking, and that is just what you want him or her to do. And as you conduct the interview, the most effective approach is to use questions that start with, "What," "Where," "When," "How," "Who," and "Why."

Many of today's applicants have been advised that the more the interviewer talks during the job interview, the more that interviewer will like the applicant. As a result, some applicants are going to try to get you to do the bulk of the talking. You should certainly be willing to answer the applicants' questions, as the quality of their questions can tell you a great deal, but you should not spend much time doing so until you have determined that the individual is a viable applicant, and that typically occurs toward the end of the interview.

In order to increase the likelihood of getting a clear and accurate picture of the applicant, it is also helpful to have more than one interview and to have some of your associates participate in an interview or conduct one themselves.

This Is Just a Test

Some employers swear by employment tests, while others swear at them. If you are going to venture into this arena, one safe route is to use work sample tests and skill tests, along with other screening instruments that identify skills that are truly related to the job.

Some companies use aptitude tests and personality tests. However, unless the tests are scientifically validated and proven to be predictive of success on the job, and are able to do so without discriminating illegally, you can run into all sorts of legal problems. It is also important to make sure that these tests do not contain items that probe into the applicants' private lives. In a word, if you are going to test the waters in this area, get some professional help.

With Reference to Reference Checks

Although you may believe that you have found the ideal candidate for the job, everything he or she may have told you could be a lie. Or perhaps this ideal candidate happened to hold back a few gems that would be an instant red flag if you knew of them. In a word, it is essential that you contact the applicant's references and verify the information that he or she has provided.

Once the applicant has given you permission to contact his or her previous employers, you should try to verify as much job-related information as possible. This would include the dates of employment, general responsibilities, key accomplishments, salary, strengths and weaknesses, and why the individual left.

You should also ask the reference if he or she would rehire the applicant. If the response is that the company has a policy not to rehire former employees, simply ask if the reference would be willing to rehire if the company had no such policy.

A lesser-known reason for checking references is due to the possibility of what is called negligent hiring. In a word, you have a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment and to protect your employees from injuries that are caused by employees who you knew, or should have known, could present a risk of harm to others.

If you do not check an applicant's background carefully, and that individual is then hired and goes on to injure one of your employees,

your company could be sued for negligent hiring. This development underlines the extreme importance of conducting thorough references.

Decision Time

Once you have completed each of the steps in this process, you will have all the information you need to determine the best candidate for the job. And by doing so, you are actually being the kind of boss that the applicants deserve, as well as the kind of boss that your employees deserve.

For the applicants, your thoroughness and fairness will help steer the most suitable candidates toward a job in which they have a high likelihood of excelling, while steering less qualified applicants away from a work situation in which they are not likely to find much satisfaction or success.

Your ability to screen and select new staff is a great help to your employees, because the new hires are more likely to be well-qualified and ready to work, contribute, learn, and be a viable part of the team. In addition, your thoroughness at each step of the process will also help keep the work environment safe. All of this is exactly what your employees deserve from a boss.

Let's Get Oriented

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here are still bosses who live by a "sink-or-swim" policy that calls for newly hired employees to be tossed into the turbulent waters of the job, and then let nature take its course. The idea is that the employees who are worth their salt will survive, and the rest will be left by the wayside.

Although this may sound like a macho and exciting way to introduce new hires to their job, the reality is that this approach introduces nothing but problems for the new employee, the existing employees, and the organization itself.

The best way to have a new employee smoothly and successfully transition into a job is by having an orientation. This does not mean spending a morning in the human resources office completing insurance forms, but rather a planned program with a variety of formal and informal techniques to help the new employee understand his or her job in the broadest sense of the word. This includes an understanding not only of the job responsibilities, priorities, and standards, but some real insight into the department, the people, the company at large, the

reporting relationships, the values and culture, and the key policies and procedures.

A great deal of time, energy, and money are spent every time a new employee is brought on board. It is unfair to all of the players to go through a hiring process that brings the new employee through the front door, only to then cast his or her fate to the corporate winds. A new employee deserves every opportunity to adjust quickly and successfully to his or her job, and bosses who have a truly functional orientation program are setting the stage for just such an outcome.

Behind Every Successful Orientation

There is actually an entire continuum of compelling reasons for having a solid orientation for your new employees. After all, without such an orientation, employees are destined to be literally and figuratively disoriented.

It's your turnover

Numerous studies continue to find that a weak orientation, or no orientation at all, is directly linked to employee turnover. Without an orientation, newly hired personnel are far more likely to experience distress, dissatisfaction, and alienation, all of which contribute to an early permanent departure.

First impressions that last

The way that a new employee is treated during the early days on the job tends to have a lasting impact on his or her attitude toward the job itself, the company, and all of the significant others at the workplace. When an employee is simply thrown into the job, his or her first impression of the company is that there is minimal concern for the employees, a lack of organization, questionable integrity, and no empathy or consideration. And, importantly, these feelings tend to leave an enduring mark on the employee's attitudes, commitment, loyalty, and productivity.

In a word, an effective orientation starts the employee off on the right foot and in a positive state of mind. This type of early momentum helps create and solidify a mind-set that greatly enhances the employee's learning, growth, loyalty, productivity, and pride.

Stressing the matter

A poor or nonexistent orientation can also set the stage for an extremely stressful work situation. In fact, such an approach contains many of the classic ingredients associated with stress on the job, such as obstacles in front of goals, unclear or inconsistent expectations, conflicting role expectations, and arbitrary workload demands. Employee reactions to these so-called stressors include anxiety, depression, aggressiveness, poor decision-making, absenteeism, accidents, and generally poor performance, all for want of a decent orientation.

Get the wheels in motion

A solid orientation also has the proven advantage of reducing the amount of time that a new employee needs to learn the whats, whys, and wherefores of the job. With a shortened learning curve, the employee can become productive sooner, and this has real benefits for the department as well as for the employee.

It is not uncommon to find new employees wondering if they made the right decision in joining a company. With a marginal orientation, they have plenty of time to rehash this question in their own mind, and the answer is likely to be negative. However, when the same employee is participating in a cutting-edge orientation, there is minimal time to be wondering about the decision to join the company, and, if the thought does come up, the employee has received enough guidance, support, and camaraderie to feel that he or she indeed made the right choice.

Accelerated teamwork

A well-structured orientation automatically promotes communication, not only between the new hire and his or her peers, but also between the new hire and some of the departmental leaders. In fact, such an orientation specifically includes opportunities for the new employees to receive guidance and support from other members of the staff. With this kind of contact, the process of building relationships and teamwork accelerates greatly.

Before the Employee Arrives

Most bosses conceive of an orientation in terms of the training steps to be taken once the newly hired employee arrives on the job.

However, there are a number of critical steps to take prior to that date in order to increase the likelihood of a successful orientation and transition to the job.

Touching base

Once you have made a job offer to an applicant, it is very important to maintain frequent contact with him or her prior to the actual starting date. This can be done through a combination of e-mail, telephone calls, and follow-up letters, brochures, and documentation. By having a good deal of advance contact with this individual, you are reducing his or her anxiety, answering questions, providing key pieces of information, expressing positive expectations, and setting the stage for a successful welcome, orientation, and transition.

At some time shortly before the new employee's first day on the job, it is very helpful to provide him or her with some basic landing instructions. This information includes a confirmation of the starting date, the arrival time, where to park, where to go, who to ask for, how to find you, and any other basic information (such as the dress code) unique to your company that will help.

Housekeeping matters

Well in advance of the new employee's arrival, you will need to make sure that his or her work area is set up properly. Depending upon the job, this means that the office area should be clean and free of old boxes or unnecessary materials from a predecessor. It should have all the necessary furniture, supplies, and equipment, and, if warranted, a computer, telephone, e-mail address, keys, access codes, and other basics that support the position in question.

What's the plan?

It is very important to spell out what the newly hired employee is going to be doing once he or she arrives, not only for the first day, but for the first several weeks at least. There is no automatic formula here, but there should be specific times established for the individual to go through the various components of the orientation program.

As part of this planning process, there needs to be agreement regarding the content and objectives of the orientation and who is responsible for carrying out each part of it, with all of these players

clearly understanding their roles, responsibilities, and schedule. If your company has a human resources department, this is the time to coordinate with it and clarify the areas it will be covering and the schedule. Importantly, whether there is a human resources department or not, you should keep your calendar as clear as possible on the first day, and keep several blocks open at least for the remainder of the first week.

This is also the time to let the rest of your employees know about the new staff member, unless they have already met him or her as part of the screening process. Either way, you can set some positive expectations by letting the employees know about the highlights of the new employee's background, experience, and skills. It is also quite helpful to let the employees know about the new hire's responsibilities, title, and job objectives.

You should also select a mentor to help provide the new employee with ongoing help, guidance, and support during this orientation and adjustment period. The mentor is the front line of the orientation process and will be responsible for ongoing coaching and guidance, as well as providing practical answers and other important information. The mentor should be an employee who is fully immersed in the company's culture and has positive attitudes toward his or her work and toward the company at large. Employees who have been demonstrating informal leadership skills in dealings with their co-workers can be particularly effective in this role.

Day One for the New Employee

On the new employee's first day, some of the more common initial steps include an introduction to the rest of the staff, a further explanation of the job and how it fits into the bigger picture, some paperwork processing, and a tour of the work area and building, with appropriate stops at the restrooms, water cooler, supply room, mail room, and other highlights specific to your company. Although these are all important actions, they lack a special flare to make the employee feel comfortable, welcomed, and assured that he or she has made the right decision.

As a result, in addition to some of the garden variety actions befitting a new employee on his or her first day on the job, you should try to think of this day as a welcoming ceremony. Try to have as many members of your team as possible available to welcome this individual

to your department. You should also have some food out, such as bagels, donuts, or even a cake, and there should be a representative of senior management present to greet the new hire as well.

The new employee should meet his or her mentor at this time and should also be given a clear idea of how the orientation is going to work. This step will further help reduce the mystery and unknown elements associated with the orientation, and it will help reduce the new hire's anxiety as well.

Although there is going to be some essential paperwork that needs to be completed, it can be handled at various points during the day, rather than in a two- or three-hour paperwork marathon. And some of the less vital paperwork can be completed on the following day or days. In addition, either you or your mentor should stay with the new hire to help him or her complete the paperwork more expeditiously.

There is plenty of information that a new employee needs to know, but he or she does not need all of it on the first day, or in the first week, or, for that matter, in the first month. For example, to spend hours going over the company's health insurance plan early in the orientation is a tremendous waste of time. For the most part, the employee is not interested in it, and taking the time to review it is boring for this employee, particularly when he or she has other interests, concerns, and questions.

A rather nice touch on the first day is for you and some of your staff to have lunch with the new employee. And your employees should continue this practice for the first couple of weeks.

In addition, one of the most important steps on the first day is to get the new employee started on a project. This does not mean some low-level task to get his or her feet wet, but rather a challenging yet manageable project that immediately taps into some of the skills, abilities, and strengths that helped convince you to hire this individual in the first place. The satisfaction associated with this type of project helps build the new employee's positive attitude toward the first day of work, while also helping to get the new work relationship off to a running start.

The 2 Main Topics

In the broadest sense, there are two areas to be covered in an effective orientation. The first focuses on topics related to the job

itself, while the second focuses on topics related to the company at large.

In some companies, the department manager may handle most of the job-specific topics, while a human resources representative would handle the company-specific topics. In other companies, there may be any number of approaches, such as having the department manager handle the entire orientation, or perhaps the department manager conducting it in conjunction with employees in the department and key individuals from other departments.

As the boss, it is important for you to have a clear understanding of your role in orienting new employees, no matter how broad or limited that role may be, and then to plan and organize the orientation within these parameters.

About the job

Whether there is a human resources department involved or not, your job as boss typically includes orienting the new employee to a broad range of issues associated with the job itself. You can provide this type of introduction on your own or with the support of other key peers, as well as employees in your department.

Some of the most important job-specific topics to be covered in the departmental side of the orientation include the following:

▸ The department's vision, values, and objectives.

▸ Job responsibilities, priorities, standards, and expectations.

▸ Departmental operations and how the new employee's job fits in.

▸ How the department contributes to company operations and goals.

▸ Organization structure.

▸ Roles of other employees in the department.

▸ Introductions to co-workers and explanations of their jobs.

▸ Introductions to key personnel and leadership from other departments with whom the employee will be working.

▸ Internet, Intranet, e-mail, and voice mail usage and access codes.

▸ Physical work environment and equipment.

▸ Key policies that affect your employees every day, particularly those that relate to pay and raise practices, promotions, sick leave and time off, breaks, work hours, safety, dealings with fellow employees, dress code, probationary period, and Internet usage.

▸ Performance review system.

▸ Training opportunities and programs.

▸ Any special vocabulary, lingo, or acronyms unique to the company.

▸ Names and e-mail addresses of key colleagues and where to go with various questions.

▸ Frequently asked questions.

It is important for the newly hired employee to maintain a good deal of contact and communication with his or her co-workers, because doing so further accelerates teamwork, cooperation, learning, and productivity. It can be particularly helpful for your new employee to meet with some of the other newer members of the team. Some of these individuals may have recently gone through the adjustment that your new hire is currently experiencing, and their empathy and experience can be a valuable source of advice, comfort, and support to facilitate your new employee's adjustment and assimilation.

About the company

As previously noted, the human resources staff typically provides company-wide information in the orientation. However, this can vary depending upon a number of factors, not the least of which is the size of the company, and this can mean that you may be responsible for presenting company-wide information as well. In fact, depending upon your experience and style, you may prefer to present some of this information yourself.

Either way, there is a good deal of information that needs to be presented to a new employee, and you should at least be sure that such information is not only being presented thoroughly, but also in a way that is useful and comprehensible.

Some of the more important company-specific topics to be covered in this side of the orientation include the following:

▸ Company history, tradition, culture, values, vision, and objectives.

▸ Overall company structure and organization chart.

▸ Information on the function of each department and the interrelationships.

▸ Unique aspects of the company, internally and in the marketplace.

▸ The company's product mix.

▸ Customer base and philosophy regarding quality and service.

▸ Competitors in the marketplace.

▸ Review of company literature and brochures.

▸ Company financial data including revenues, profit, and projections.

▸ Employee benefits including insurance plans, retirement plans, continuing educational programs and reimbursement, vacations and holidays, along with the various eligibility requirements.

▸ Key company policies, including equal employment opportunity, safety, harassment, pay practices and increases, personal time off, sick leave, absenteeism and tardiness, and nature of the employment relationship.

▸ Steps of the disciplinary procedure.

▸ Special company events including picnics, holiday parties, excursions, and sports teams.

▸ Local services available, such as restaurants, shops, post offices, and supermarkets.

▸ Discussion and presentation of employee handbook, accompanied by a statement to be signed by the employee indicating that he or she has received it, read it, and understands its provisions.

A Matter of Methods

Importantly, in conducting an orientation, it is important to use a number of different approaches. In this regard, if your orientation consists primarily of lecturing the new employee and giving him or her tons of paperwork to review and sign, the ultimate result will be an uninterested and uninformed employee.

The spice of life

The orientation will be far more effective if you hold the lecturing to a minimum and use a variety of additional techniques to bring the employee up to speed and up to date. These techniques include discussions, question-and-answer sessions, direct coaching, mentoring, exercises, hands-on practice, contests and games, films, videos, overheads, and handouts that are clear, readable, and functional.

The virtual approach

Many companies are also finding that the Internet or their own Intranet can be a valuable and time-saving resource in the orientation process. The idea is not to replace the traditional orientation, but merely to supplement it.

By placing much of the basic information on the company's Web site or Intranet, the new employee can go through it at his or her own pace and at a convenient time. This allows the employee to review any points that may be confusing, focus on the topics of particular interest, receive consistent information, and have many of his or her individual questions answered on the spot.

Another advantage of the virtual orientation is that this information is always up to date, because policy changes can be entered immediately, rather than waiting for the next printing. Most of these online programs have a search capacity, along with a link to the boss or appropriate individual if there are questions that remain unanswered.

It's about timing

Importantly, there is no way to provide a useful orientation in a day or two. Rather, there needs to be some prioritizing and structuring of the process, and then taking the new employee through it at a

pace that truly facilitates his or her learning, understanding, and acceptance.

Many of the most effective orientations actually last months. Obviously, in the first few weeks, there is a concerted orientation effort, but the formal and informal process continues over time, and it can include discussions, formal meetings, handouts, new material on the Intranet, and regular mentoring.

Give the Employees a Chance

If you want your new employees to have a real chance of succeeding on the job, they need a first-rate orientation. Without this kind of a running start, they are far more likely to trip and fall.

In fact, new employees deserve every opportunity to adjust quickly to the job and sense the full range of satisfaction that work can offer. If you aspire to be the boss your employees deserve, it is only natural for you to provide them with the orientation they deserve.

Chapter 13

Evaluate the Performance Evaluations

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$\mathcal{E}$mployees deserve meaningful feedback on how they are doing, and a key part of your job as a boss is to provide it. The only problem is that many bosses view the prospect of having to evaluate an employee's performance in basically the same way they view the prospect of having a root canal.

Many bosses are particularly stressed about having to tell an employee that his or her performance is not up to par, and then having to deal with the defensiveness that such feedback usually generates. They are particularly fearful about approaching an employee who thinks his or her performance has been terrific, but who now needs to be told that he or she has missed the mark.

Fortunately, by using some up-to-date feedback and coaching techniques, you will not encounter any of the traditional problems that have plagued performance appraisals over the years. Even if your company has a performance appraisal system that has fallen out of date, there are still steps you can take as a boss to make the entire process more rewarding, positive, and productive.

Performance evaluations today are actually a work in progress, as there is less emphasis on the evaluative points and more emphasis on the developmental points. Rather than having the appraisal be little more than an uncomfortable ritual in which you dump some information on an employee, fill out a few forms, check a few boxes, and then move on to a more exciting activity, performance appraisal today is evolving into what is called *performance management*.

While performance management provides the employee with an assessment of his or her performance, a major objective is to use the feedback process as a way to build the employee's skills, productivity, motivation, and overall effectiveness. Rather than a traditional laundry list of where the employee succeeded and failed, performance management has a much stronger developmental component, and that is exactly what employees seek and deserve in the feedback process.

What's the Point?

A performance management system not only provides an employee with useful feedback and coaching, but actually fulfills several additional important functions at the same time.

Motivation matters

Researchers continue to find that feedback has a positive motivational impact. When employees are given a clear, fair, and accurate picture of their performance, they tend to be more energized to make some improvements. Without such feedback, employees may not know where they need to focus, and they may believe that they are doing better or worse than the facts may warrant. Either way, without reinforcement, employee motivation will suffer.

Time for some goals

A key part of the performance management process includes jointly setting goals with your employees. By doing so, the employee has a clear idea of the objectives, along with high degree of ownership and personal commitment to meeting them. In a broader sense, there is no question that the presence of goals has a strong motivational impact on an employee.

Relationship building

With the increased contact, communication, and interaction that accompanies performance management, an additional positive outcome is increased bonding with your employees. In addition, with this strengthened working relationship, there tends to be a related increase in the employees' involvement, loyalty, and commitment.

Who needs training?

By regularly monitoring and coaching your employees, you are also going to find some patterns and trends that point to a need for broader or more in-depth training. After all, training programs should be selected on the basis of training needs, and a functional performance management program is one highly effective way to identify them.

Administrative issues

Well-documented feedback that accompanies performance management will also help you administratively. This data can be very useful in determining raises, promotions, transfers, and additional assignments. With a high degree of two-way communication inherent to this approach, your employees are also likely to show less resistance to the decisions that are made in this area.

Check the exposure

With a functional appraisal as part of an overall system of performance management, you are also taking some of the necessary steps to keep legal exposure to a minimum. For example, by clearly, fairly, and accurately noting an employee's ongoing performance, you are simultaneously generating documentation to support any actions you may need to take with this individual, particularly in terms of discipline, transfers, or termination.

In with the New

By looking at performance appraisal as part of performance management, you will still have many components of traditional appraisals, but within a context that focuses more on employee growth, goal attainment, and productivity.

Performance management actually starts when you set your objectives with your own boss. Then, when you sit down to help your employees establish their goals, you can do so in a framework that connects your company goals, your boss's goals, your department's goals, and your own goals. In a word, it is the interrelationship of goals at each level that glues the company together and propels it toward its overall objectives.

What's in a goal?

Once you have your goals in place, meet individually with your employees to help them set theirs. Your employees may tell you that their goals are to improve productivity or build their skills, but these types of statements are little more than wishes. Although it is nice to wish for positive outcomes, they are not going to happen unless they are formulated as goals.

A goal is a clear, specific, prioritized, and measurable outcome that an individual commits to achieve within a defined period of time. For example, if you have an employee who wishes to improve his or her productivity, turn this wish into a goal by spelling out the priority of this objective, the specific level of productivity, the way to measure it, and the timing and deadlines.

In addition to having goals, your employees will need specific plans to get there. For any given evaluation period, you and your employees will need to sit down and jointly establish the goals to be met within the review period, as well as the action plans to make it happen.

2 types of goals

One set of goals is in the area of performance. These goals focus on specific outcomes in such areas as productivity, quality, service, or interpersonal relations. Importantly, these goals should not only relate to your own goals and those of the department, but they should also fit in with the company's values, culture, and overall objectives. This can call for goals in such additional areas as safety and community service.

A second set of goals for you to establish with your employees is in the area of individual development. These goals focus on employee learning and growth. They can include specific objectives regarding training, course work, certifications, designations, or licensure.

You be the coach

Once you and your employees have established these goals, you have essentially created the criteria to be used in evaluating an employee's performance during the current review period. With performance management, you are going to be meeting with your employee formally and informally throughout the period and providing him or her with any feedback, follow-up, coaching, and guidance that might be necessary for him or her to meet the objectives.

Some of the objectives may need minimal monitoring and feedback on your part, while others call for frequent interaction between the two of you. The purpose of this interaction is not so much to appraise or evaluate the employee's performance as it is to provide him or her with more training, guidance, and support.

In this way, the employee knows exactly how he or she is doing throughout the performance cycle. And as a result of your regular coaching and guidance, he or she can take immediate steps to correct problems and even prevent problem situations. This approach keeps the communication lines open, builds credibility and trust, enhances the employee's sense of self-esteem and self-worth, further develops the employee's skills, adds to his or her overall satisfaction, and greatly increases the likelihood that he or she will actually meet the stated objectives.

At the same time, as the project moves along, you may find that totally unforeseen circumstances have made the goals untenable. As a result, there may be a need for some adjustment. This will be a judgment call on your part, but some flexibility is definitely worth considering in today's volatile work environment and economy. This can go a long way toward building employee loyalty, commitment, and trust.

Evaluation time

With performance management, your employee's work is being regularly evaluated by you through the active feedback and coaching inherent to this process. As a result, your employee has a consistently clear idea of the effectiveness of his or her performance and any steps for improvement that may be needed.

At the same time, performance management includes a more formal evaluation component as well, typically at the end of the stipulated review period. One of the real benefits of this process is that

when you meet with your employee for this evaluation, your employee can assess his or her performance just as effectively as you. Your employee already knows exactly how he or she has been doing and is fully aware of the successes, failures, strengths, weaknesses, and areas needing improvement.

This approach eliminates the anxiety, unknown elements, and defensiveness so common in traditional appraisals. It allows for a truly productive interaction with your employee regarding past performance as well as future goals. In fact, this formal evaluation session has a strong developmental component, because it is also used as the basis for setting some of the goals for the next period. Once those goals have been set, the performance management cycle then repeats itself.

One of the major drawbacks of the traditional appraisal system is that employees can go for months without any relevant feedback or coaching. As if this is not problematic in and of itself, when the evaluation time arrives, the employee is typically in for a big shock. Receiving a shocking evaluation is extremely distressing and unnerving for an employee, and it is equally distressing and unnerving for the boss who delivers it. With a performance management system in place, this shocking outcome is eliminated from the start.

Separate sessions for separate purposes

In traditional performance appraisals, the employees receive a review and the session ends with the boss saying how much of a raise the employee will or will not receive. The problem with this approach is that most employees are thinking about money from the second the session starts, and they pay minimal attention to any other comments while waiting to hear what they are going to get.

Further, this type of approach often drags in information about the employee's performance from months before, and the employee hardly remembers any of it. However, even if the employee can free himself from the monetary underpinnings of this session and actually hear what the boss may be saying about what happened a month or two ago, his or her typical reaction is going to be denial and defensiveness. With this type of outcome, it is no wonder that so many bosses get queasy around appraisal time.

Under the performance management model, you are giving your employees feedback and guidance every step along the way. Some of

the sessions with your employees will focus more on past performance, and others will focus more on goal-setting. And when it is time to talk about raises, the best approach is to have a separate session to do so. In this way, the objectives of the discussion are clear from the start, while distractions and tension are removed.

Pointers for Positive Sessions

There are several related pointers that can help keep the formal performance evaluation sessions positive and productive.

Be prepared

Even though you have been monitoring your employee's performance and maintained a high level of two-way communication throughout the period, it is still important to be fully prepared before you actually have the sit-down session. This means that you should carefully review all of the performance data before completing any of your company's forms in this area.

It is also important to remember that people tend to be overly influenced by recent events. With this in mind, be careful that you do not rate an employee too leniently or harshly as a result of his or her most recent performance or behaviors.

Advance notice

Another step that is helpful in the review process is to give the employee a copy of the completed review prior to the meeting. By doing so, the meeting can focus more on discussing past performance and setting the stage for improvement, rather than having your employee spend time reading the evaluation on the spot and then having to come up with some instant responses. Of course, with the ongoing coaching and guidance that you have been providing, there is no doubt that the employee already knows much of the feedback and has already been thinking about future goals.

In the session

It is always helpful to start these sessions with some friendly comments and to maintain an upbeat and positive atmosphere from beginning to end. No matter how your company's evaluations may be

documented, it will be important to have work-specific examples behind any rating that you may give, whether in the form of a written comment, a numerical rating, or both.

Importantly, whether you use a carefully structured performance evaluation form or a more general narrative approach, the emphasis should be on behaviors that support the company's climate, goals, and visions. If the focus strays from these areas, or if the form is cumbersome, vague, unrealistic, or impractical in any other ways, you owe it to yourself and your employees to approach human resources, if your company has such a department, or senior management with some suggestions.

As you reach the end of the formal session, it will be important for the employee to sign off, indicating that he or she has read the evaluation. However, the employee need not agree with the evaluation in order to sign off, and he or she can enter his or her own comments if desired. It should be noted that this outcome is not uncommon under traditional evaluation programs, while being practically nonexistent under performance management programs.

Either way, as the session concludes, it is always helpful to wrap it up with positive expectations. After all, it has been repeatedly found that positive expectations contribute to positive behaviors.

It's the behavior

Whenever you provide your employees with feedback, whether on a formal or informal basis, be sure that your comments are focused on specific behaviors and not on personality traits. If you tell an employee that he or she is lazy, the most likely response is an argument. However, if you focus on specific behaviors that illustrate an employee's laziness or lack of energy, and place the comment as close to that behavior as possible, then you are likely to be heard. For example, rather than saying, "I am concerned with your laziness," a boss is more likely to have a meaningful exchange by focusing on the specific behavior that triggered the concern, such as, "Several parts of this project were left out. Anything I can do to help?"

Multilevel messages

In addition to providing employees with feedback from their boss, many companies have programs that provide employees with feedback

from their peers, subordinates, and even customers. This feedback is obviously not a full-blown evaluation, but rather a work-specific summary that anonymously notes what others like and dislike about working with the employee in question. This data, in combination with the feedback that you provide, can give you and your employees some valuable insights into their strengths and areas for improvement.

Further, it can be very helpful for an employee to complete an evaluation on himself or herself. It is always interesting to review the differences in the way that you see the employee versus the way that the employee sees himself or herself. These variances in perceptions can help the employee focus more effectively on the priorities of the job, and can also help identify areas in which more guidance may be needed.

Virtually evaluated

A growing number of companies today are supplementing their performance management programs with feedback to the employees on the company's Intranet. Obviously the one-on-one sessions between an employee and his or her boss are critical to the performance management and appraisal process, but this virtual addition allows the employee to get real-time feedback on progress and performance, and to do so at any time and from any place.

By using a performance management system and its powerful coaching and evaluation components, you have a real opportunity to provide a framework for your employees to perform at their best and develop the broad range of skills and aptitudes that they bring to the job. The vast majority of employees today seek and deserve the myriad advantages associated with performance management, and they also seek and deserve a boss who is committed to this approach and its objectives.

Get to the Bottom Line on Training and Development

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*A*nother important way to be the boss that your employees deserve is to provide them with the opportunities for training and development that they deserve. Most employees are highly interested in personal growth, and bosses who foster it also tend to build morale, motivation, commitment, and productivity.

At the same time, just because employees are interested in educational opportunities does not mean that they are interested in every training program that's out there. In fact, employees can easily tell when training is provided merely for the sake of training, as the transparent content, techniques, and mode of presentation tend to miss the mark completely.

This means that before selecting any training program, no matter what you may have heard about it, some advance planning is necessary. Obviously you are interested in having your employees learn something from the program, but without some initial groundwork, all the employees are likely to learn is that the training is rather useless.

Behind Every Training Program

Beyond the possible increases in morale, motivation, commitment, and productivity, there is actually a broad spectrum of reasons to support employee education.

Part of the vision

When you establish a culture, vision, and set of values that are premised on respect, trust, and support, a natural part of that package is to make a serious commitment to employee growth and development. Without such a commitment, your vision becomes blurred, and the employees tend to view it as being nothing but words. By building the employees' knowledge base, you are also building your own credibility.

Raising the probability of success

As important as it is to establish clear, prioritized, and measurable objectives, they will be meaningless if the employees lack the wherewithal to meet them. With targeted educational programs, the employees can bolster their skills as well as their self-esteem, and this can help them reach and surpass objectives that may have been little more than wishes without such training.

What did you expect?

Employees today generally expect a company to make a commitment to their growth and development. It is not as if they take this for granted, but rather, they view it as an important part of the job and culture of the organization. If these key expectations are not met, it is not surprising to find that many employees will seek to have them fulfilled elsewhere.

Taking a value-added approach

Many bosses recognize that the employees are the company's most valuable resources. They also understand that by prudently investing in their development, tremendous additional value can be added, well in excess of the cost of the training itself. This, of course, means that careful steps are taken to select the most appropriate programs, as well as to analyze their effectiveness.

The bottom line

A growing expectation today is that training programs must contribute to the bottom line. This actually makes a great deal of sense, because training typically purports to improve motivation, quality, and productivity. If there is no change in the bottom line as a result of the training, then the claims of the training program need a closer look.

So Many Programs, So Little Time

There are training programs today for just about every imaginable topic. One major quest for a boss is to figure out the key areas in which the employees need further development and then start the wheels turning to determine the most appropriate program.

It looks good on paper

Some bosses may select training based on referrals, reputation, or glossy promotions, but there is no reason to assume your employees need anything these random programs may offer. In fact, you may hear from a respected individual at another company that he or she just implemented an incredible training program that reduced turnover, increased output, and dropped customer complaints an amazing 90 percent.

Before you start cutting a check, there are a couple of key points to consider. First, just because the training may indeed have worked in another company does not mean it would work in yours. Second, there may be some confusion between correlation and causality. The training may well have accompanied the remarkable improvements, but it might not have caused them. For example, a dramatic drop in customer complaints may well be due to training, but it could just as easily be due to other simultaneous developments, such as the introduction of major product improvements.

A matter of need

One of the most important points for you to consider when selecting a training program is the employees' needs. By doing so, you are more likely to implement training that will actually help the employees meet their objectives and the company meet its objectives.

The first step in identifying your employees' training needs is to look at the way your department is functioning and see if there are any indicators that jump right out at you. Clear indicators can include quality problems, interdepartmental difficulties, productivity decreases, sexual harassment claims, or other similar critical incidents.

Beyond this basic approach, there are a number of additional techniques that can help, such as by surveying the employees, directly asking them about areas in which they would like to receive additional training, reviewing comments from other supervisory personnel, and reviewing performance appraisal data.

High-tech tracking

Some companies are using learning management software to help them monitor the employees' training levels, prior courses, progress, and future training needs. This is a quick and easy way for a boss to see exactly where any given employee may be in the training cycle, and then make more appropriate training and career-path decisions.

These programs can keep track of training costs on a per-employee and overall basis, and they can also generate a measure of the return on investment for such training.

Also on the technical front, growing numbers of companies are emphasizing what is called knowledge management. The idea is to capture and use the broad base of knowledge held by a company— ranging from its files and databases to the employees' expertise. The company regards this information as assets, and because it is searchable, it can be shared, enhanced, applied to work situations, and used as a further basis for identifying training needs and helping the company meet its goals.

Training Checkpoints

In selecting or designing any training program, there are several additional checkpoints along the way that can help you make sure your employees will be getting the training they need and deserve.

Objectives that are not subjective

From the outset, any training program should have clear and measurable goals that contribute to the overall objectives of the department

and company at large. These goals should be spelled out prior to implementing the program, and they should provide a quantitative benchmark for measuring the effectiveness of the training program upon completion.

In other words, if your needs analysis has indicated that your sales team needs to improve their overall sales skills, the objectives would not be to simply upgrade their ability to sell. Rather the goal of the training should be expressed quantitatively, such as in terms of improved close ratios or higher profit per sale.

Motivation makes it happen

Even if you have the world's greatest training program for your employees, you are not going to have much success if they are not motivated to learn. Importantly, employees tend to have minimal motivation to learn if they either sense no need for the training or fail to see how they will benefit as a result of it.

This is another key reason for employee involvement in the process of selecting the training itself. With some participation in the decision-making process, the employees tend to have a clearer idea of the need for the training, as well as higher levels of personal commitment to it. And, with this mind-set, they tend to be more energized to learn.

But Will They Learn?

Obviously, one of the objectives of any training program is for the participants to learn. However, for this to occur, a program needs to have a number of key components. Thus, whether reviewing or designing a training program for your staff, you should make sure that it includes all the following:

I. Appropriate learning level

In addition to paying attention to the individual needs of the employees, the program should be presented at a level that is meaningful, significant, and useful to the participants. One of the best ways to guarantee failure of a training program is to grossly undershoot or overshoot the skills, abilities, and general knowledge of the participants. In a word, the better you understand your employees as individuals, the better your chances of providing them with the kind of training that they need and deserve.

2. Source credibility

The credibility of the individual or individuals who train your employees will have a major impact on the learning that goes on, regardless of the kind of training that is being provided. To illustrate the point, if the American Heart Association were to announce that a new study found that saturated fat is unrelated to heart disease, you may well believe it. However, if the exact same announcement were made by the Association of Saturated Fat Producers, you would most likely dismiss it.

The same principle applies in training. If the employees do not respect or trust the trainer, the information is likely to be dismissed. This further underscores the importance of carefully checking out the entire training program before any commitments are made.

3. Practice time

Truly effective training explains and demonstrates the new concepts, skills, and behaviors, and then provides the participants with numerous opportunities to practice. In fact, practice is a key element in the process of human learning. When a training program merely throws out information on unwitting employees, it is the program itself that should be thrown out.

4. Feedback mechanisms

For learning to take place, trainees need to know when they have learned correctly and when they have missed the mark. Without feedback, employees may take in all sorts of information and learn numerous different skills, but all of it could be totally wrong. This is why the best forms of training provide the employees with a high degree of two-way communication, guidance, and coaching.

It is particularly important for employees to be given feedback when they practice. Without it, they may certainly put in all the necessary practice time, but the problem is that they may be practicing the wrong behaviors. And when it's time to apply these new practiced behaviors on the job, the errors will abound. In a word, the old adage "practice makes perfect" is wrong. It should actually read, "perfect practice makes perfect," and that is precisely what feedback can do.

5. Transference

One of the most important elements in any employee education program is the extent to which the training applies to the skills and behaviors needed on the job. In some cases, the training has absolutely nothing to do with work, while in other cases, the newly acquired skills and behaviors are neither rewarded nor appreciated on the job. Either way, the result is that the training will be useless.

6. Stimulation

Many of the best employee education programs include a mix of training approaches and technologies. This not only helps make the entire process more interesting and stimulating, but also increases the likelihood of tapping into the learning style and aptitudes of each of the participants. When training programs resort to one or two tired old methods, such as a lecture accompanied by some overheads, it is just a matter of time before most of the participants become tired, too.

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Different employees and different topics call for different training approaches, and that is exactly what you will find in the best training programs. And that's exactly what your employees deserve.

A World of Training Options

There is a vast range of on- and off-the-job training programs, and the numbers are growing every day. With in-depth understanding of your employees and careful analysis of the training objectives, you should be able to focus on several programs that best fit the needs of your employees, your department, and the company at large.

At the same time, in spite of the myriad training options available, it is interesting to note that many studies have found that some of the most powerful and enduring learning experiences for employees come from their informal daily contact with their peers and supervision. Thus, those chats around the water cooler may actually be training sessions.

This also means that your actions are critical, because they show your employees the kinds of behaviors that are expected and rewarded in your company. As boss, you are a compelling model for your team, and much of what they learn and how they behave is a direct result of what you say and do. If you truly believe that your employees deserve excellent training, then the hallmark of your own behavior should be excellence as well.

On-the-job options

As the name implies, on-the-job training is literally provided while your employees are working. One of the main advantages of this type of training is that the employees are learning exactly what they need to do on the job, and, as a result, the transference is strong. In addition to building communication and the working relationship with the individual or individuals who may be providing the training, there can also be cost savings with this approach.

At the same time, the main disadvantage of on-the-job training is that the objective on the job is to get the job done, and training can come in a distant second. Further, because the person training the new employees may not be trained as a trainer, there can be some questions about his or her skills in this area. Sometimes the shortcuts that are taught on the job may not be the best way to get the work done. In addition, when there are accidents or breakage, the costs can be very high.

With these caveats in mind, on-the-job training still plays an important role in employee development, starting with the orientation and spanning well into the future. Some of the more popular on-the-job programs include internships, apprenticeships, job rotation, mentoring, coaching, and modeling. Depending upon the training needs and the employees' skill levels, any of these techniques can be highly effective. At the same time, you can often increase their value by combining on-the-job training with off-the-job training.

Off-the-job options

As its name implies, off-the-job training is any form of training that is provided while the employee is not working. It might be in the company, even at the employee's desk, or it could be on a distant island.

As is the case with on-the-job training, this form of training has its advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, the most important point is that the emphasis is purely on training. Employee learning comes first, and more time can be allocated to questions and discussion. There are fewer distractions and interruptions, along with more opportunities for practice. Off-the-job training also offers the possibility of providing more variety in the program itself, such as through the use of exercises, videotapes, games, and much more.

In addition, the individuals providing such training usually have stronger training skills. And the accidents and breakage that can be so disruptive during on-the-job training can be easily handled during off-the-job training, as they actually provide valuable learning opportunities.

On the negative side, one key problem associated with this type of training is the issue of transference. In some cases, the skills that are emphasized and practiced during these off-the-job sessions simply do not apply on the job. Employees return to their jobs ready to apply their newly acquired skills, only to find that they either do not work or are not appreciated.

Another set of problems associated with this type of training is focused on costs. First, there can be a costly drop in productivity when employees are away from their jobs. Second, these training programs can be expensive, especially if there are outside trainers or travel expenses.

There is a vast array of off-the-job training options that can be very effective, such as lectures, seminars, university programs, videos, films, cassettes, role playing, simulations, case studies, business games, computer-based training, and even scavenger hunts.

In fact, one popular trend is the movement toward experiential learning, where you might find trainees building with blocks, playing with toys, and literally as well as figuratively building bridges. With some follow-up debriefing, these types of programs can be very effective in building teams, improving communication, and developing leadership skills.

Web-based Training

For several years, employers have used various distance learning programs that permit employees to undergo individual training far from their work. These kinds of programs have ranged from audio

and video cassettes to computer-based training. However, in a literal and figurative sense, the Internet has opened up a new world of training.

One of the major trends in off-the-job employee education is Web-based training, where the participants only need a computer that is connected to the Internet and equipped with a Web browser. With this in hand, almost anything that can be taught in a classroom can now be taught online. It can be accomplished with all of the elements that are so important in the learning process, including tailoring to the individual's learning style and pace, practice opportunities, feedback, and a high degree of transference.

In terms of the few limitations associated with this approach, Web-based training is not particularly effective if your objectives are focused on building the employees' skills in areas that call for a good deal of face-to-face interaction or body language.

Virtually 2 approaches

The best way to look at the possibilities associated with Web-based training is through its two key frameworks.

The first is what is called *asynchronous Web-based Internet/Intranet training*. This just-in-time approach is self-directed and self-paced, and the employees can access the program or information whenever and wherever they want. This works particularly well for basic types of training where there is not much of a need for interaction. Importantly, all of the employees do not need to be online at the same time in order to take advantage of this approach, nor do they need to be at similar skill levels.

The second approach is called *synchronous Web-based Internet/ Intranet training*. This is a real-time approach in which all of the participants may be in different geographical locations, but are online at the same time. Through a network connection, they are able to interact with each other and with the instructor. This approach provides for high quality delivery, along with opportunities for the participants to discuss the information, ask questions, and access needed information immediately.

Web-based training offers the additional advantage of eliminating travel costs by making a broad range of educational materials available online. These materials are either up-to-date or easily updated,

and there is more consistency throughout the process. Many employees enjoy learning this way, and it is not uncommon to find that they do so during their non-work hours, which leads to additional savings.

Importantly, distance learning need not be the only form of training for your employees. In fact, it serves as an excellent complement to other forms of training. For example, the employees can use Web-based training to learn some of the basics, and then go to a more traditional classroom session to practice and apply what they have learned online. This eliminates a substantial amount of classroom time that would have been devoted to the acquisition of this introductory knowledge, and allows these in-class sessions to get right down to business.

The reality is that Web-based training meets many of the demands of today's rapidly changing jobs and the vast cadres of employees who are highly interested in continued growth and development. Some bosses believe that e-learning is a fad that passed with the dotcom meltdown, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Distance learning has continued to grow at close to an exponential rate, and bosses who ignore its widespread advantages are ignoring one of the most powerful ways to build productivity, retention, motivation, and knowledge assets. Both you and your employees deserve the benefits of this approach.

How'd It Go?

One of the most important steps in any training program is evaluation. After all, when you invest money in your personal life, you like to know if the investment was worthwhile. The same principle applies here. At the same time, although there are several ways to assess the effectiveness of these programs, several fall short.

Instant reaction

One of the most popular evaluation methods is to wait until the end of the program and then ask the participants what they thought of it. The only problem is that their opinion of the program does not tell you much about what they learned or whether the program had any impact on the job at all. The employees may absolutely love a program, but learn absolutely nothing. Besides, if the training was provided at a

snazzy resort, the employees automatically tend to feel more positive about it.

What did they learn?

Because the employees are supposed to learn something in these programs, there are some evaluations that focus specifically on the knowledge or skills that were acquired. In a word, the employees are given some sort of a test at the end.

There are several difficulties with this approach, including the fact that many employees do not appreciate being hit with an exam. Some feel that this connotes a lack of trust and respect. Others pay attention during the session just to pick up a few highlights that they think will be on the test. And further, even if an employee absorbs tons of information during the program and gets a perfect score on the test, there is no reason to assume that he or she can apply such knowledge to the job.

Behavior

Other evaluation methods look for changes in the employees' behaviors that may have been the result of the training. This actually gets closer to a useful evaluation, but there can be some question as to whether the changes in behavior were actually the result of the training, or were the result of other experiences. There can also be questions as to whether the changes in behavior actually meet the objectives that were established at the outset.

The actual results

One of the better ways to evaluate the effectiveness of a training program is to go back to the training-related objectives that were established at the outset and then measure the results subsequent to the program. For example, if the objective of the training program was to reduce the number of accidents by 50 percent, the next step would be to look at the number of accidents for a period of time following the training. However, because an improvement in this area might not be directly due to the training, the final step is to do a little bit of analyzing and make a reasonable assessment of the extent to which any improvement is arguably the result of the training itself.

The Learning Environment

Large numbers of employees today are highly interested in furthering their growth and development. They have seen skills become obsolete in short order, and they greatly appreciate working for an individual who places major emphasis on education.

As a boss, you are not only involved in selecting and reviewing the formal training programs, you are the primary trainer on a day-to-day basis. You do this not only by modeling the kinds of behaviors that you would like the employees to learn, but also by your actions as a coach.

When a boss makes a true commitment to education for his or her employees, the employees know it and typically respond with increased motivation, commitment, productivity, and drive. Having a boss who draws out these qualities is what most employees seek and deserve, and creating a learning environment is one of the best ways to be that boss.

Chapter 15

We Can Go on Meeting Like This

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As a boss in today's world of work, you are going to be conducting countless meetings with some or all your staff. These meetings present a prime opportunity to build your employees' productivity, effectiveness, teamwork, knowledge, and motivation. They also present a prime opportunity to waste time, aggravate the staff, generate ill will, and turn the goals into a mockery.

There is one key factor that determines whether your meetings are great for the staff or simply grate on them, and that factor is you. Employees typically put in long hours and try to make the best use of their time, and they deserve meetings that are well-organized, functional, and respectful of them and their time. That is just the kind of meeting you will provide if you truly desire to be the kind of boss your employees deserve.

Before the Meeting

Picture a boss running down the hall, papers flying everywhere behind him as he crashes through the door of the meeting room, once

again late to a meeting he had called. He drops his remaining reams of paper on the table, announces that the meeting has now started, and then starts to toss the remaining sets of papers to the weary employees who sit around the table. Of course, he is quick to ridicule any employee who arrives after him, a feat which is rather difficult, but nonetheless possible.

And so begin many meetings today. The problem is that when a boss handles a meeting this way, the meeting itself is over before it starts. Through this type of behavior, a boss is showing a complete lack of respect for the meeting and the employees in attendance. In response, the employees quickly establish the mind-set that this meeting is useless, and that is typically how they will view the information that is presented in it.

Yet, there are so many relatively easy steps that a boss can take to make any meeting highly valuable. With the dynamic nature of business, most bosses believe that meetings are essential. However, that credo misses the mark. It is not that meetings are essential, but rather, excellent meetings are essential. Those are the meetings that are planned, organized, and accompanied by clear objectives and the strategies to achieve them.

Do we need to meet?

Prior to any meeting, it is important to have a clear idea of its purpose. The key question is whether the issues at hand actually warrant a meeting, or whether they could be handled more effectively on some other basis. In a word, if the purpose of the meeting is muddled, it is guaranteed that the meeting will be muddled as well.

Meeting...the goals

In addition to spelling out the basic purpose of the meeting, it is equally important to spell out the goals. As you put together the framework for the meeting, try to consider the specific and measurable outcomes that you are seeking.

Your objectives can run a broad gamut that includes providing and sharing information, redirecting efforts, joint problem-solving, motivating the team, or managing a crisis. Regardless, there should be no question about the objectives of any meeting that you conduct.

And if there are such questions, then the bigger question is why you are holding the meeting in the first place.

As you consider the goals of the meeting, it is equally important to be thinking about the strategies necessary to reach them. This is the time to start outlining the who, what, where, when, and how for each of the objectives. You will also need to consider any additional resources, materials, or expertise that may be needed.

Who's invited?

When planning for any meeting, it is important to be clear as to who actually needs to attend. There are far too many meetings where the attendees are present primarily as a result of tradition. You are not doing any favors for the attendees or the meeting itself by including individuals who have no real reason to be there.

In fact, there are all sorts of costs associated with this random guest list. Not only are you pulling individuals off their jobs and thereby reducing their productivity, but you are also introducing a rather negative element into the meetings, hence reducing the productivity of the meetings as well. These individuals are typically quite annoyed with the expectation that they sit through a meeting that has little to do with them, and this distress is something that they carry back to the job after the meeting has ended.

As you consider the goals of the meeting, it is also helpful to spell out the goals and expectations that you have of each of the individuals who attend, not only during the meeting, but before and after the meeting as well. Once again, if there are no meeting-related goals that come to mind for some of the prospective attendees, they should not be attendees at all.

Also from the standpoint of the attendees, it makes a good deal of sense to check their availability before scheduling a meeting. Many bosses make the mistake of scheduling a meeting without such checking. The result can be questionable attendance, late arrivals, and a good deal of distress, distraction, and dissatisfaction.

The unhidden agenda

One of the most important steps to take prior to holding a meeting is to establish a clear agenda. It should start with specific information

regarding the meeting's starting and ending time, date, location, plus a brief statement of the purpose.

The heart of the agenda is a listing of every topic, the starting and ending time for each, and who is responsible. The scheduling should also include a brief period for questions and answers. If there are other roles or expectations of the attendees, they should be included in the appropriate section of the agenda, and you should send the agenda to each attendee in advance of the meeting.

The agenda is also going to put you on the proper track to plan your role in the meeting. Perhaps you will be making a major address, in which case you will need to set aside time for writing, reviewing, and practicing, as well as creating the necessary support materials. At the same time, perhaps your role will be more coordinating and facilitating, a role that obviously still calls for planning on your part, but more focused on orchestrating the meeting rather than being the focal point of the meeting. Either way, it is important to have a very clear idea of your own role and the steps that you need to take in order to assure that the meeting actually meets its objectives.

Attend to the attendees

As part of your planning for a meeting, it will be helpful to solicit your employees' ideas, inputs, and suggestions regarding topics they would like to include. If their ideas fall within the parameters of the meeting, their topics can be added accordingly. At the same time, if their topics are not appropriate for this meeting, they should nonetheless be discussed with the employees who brought them up. If such a discussion does not adequately cover the issue, then perhaps it could be included in a later meeting.

By gathering the employees' suggested topics prior to the meeting, you automatically set the stage for a more positive and productive session. You have started the employees' thought processes well in advance of the meeting, and you have built their motivation and interest by involving them in the process. This also sets the stage for them to participate more actively in the meeting, and to take more away from it as a result.

In a word, the more involved the employees are in all phases of the meeting, the more likely the meeting will have some real meaning for them. It no longer sits in a void that is thrust upon them, but

rather reflects some of their own thinking and provides them with additional opportunities to sense accomplishment, competence, and growth.

If there are materials that your employees may need to review prior to the meeting, be sure to distribute them well ahead of time. Bosses who make the mistake of handing out packets of information during a meeting soon find that they are addressing a silent reading session.

Do sweat the details

One of the best ways to undercut the effectiveness of a meeting is to overlook the basic preparatory steps. For example, have you ever seen a gaggle of employees and their boss wandering around in search of a meeting room because "someone" forgot to reserve one? So much for getting the meeting off to a running start.

In order to make sure that your meeting is not derailed by so-called minor details, the first step is obviously to be certain that the meeting room you desire is available. As part of the process, make sure that it has all the resources you need, such as the appropriate electrical outlets, connections, screens, and seating capacity and arrangement.

Be sure that all of the materials you will be using in the meeting are ready to go. Do a complete check of the computers, online applications, overheads, slides, and videos that you will be using, and make sure that you have enough handouts for everyone and that they are in the correct order.

One of the biggest mistakes is to fill your graphs, graphics, charts, or other visuals with so much detail that they cannot be comprehended or even read by anyone in the room. Remember that these resources are supposed to aid the learning process, and the idea is to keep them clear, concise, and readable. Importantly, research continues to find that participants at a meeting tend to remember more from the visuals, so they should be designed to clarify, illustrate, and simplify the points you are trying to make.

Review your options

As you plan out your meetings, it is also important to remember that you have many options beyond the traditional meeting format.

This means that you should look very carefully at the objectives of your meeting, as well as the needs, objectives, availability, and geographical location of your employees, and then select the meeting approach that fits best.

For example, it may make more sense for you to consider Web conferencing. With this approach, you can have a live real-time interactive meeting in virtually the same way as a face-to-face meeting. However, the participants can be in any geographical location, and they can listen by phone and simultaneously see the selected visuals through their Web browser. The participants can also make comments and ask questions if they wish.

During the Meeting

Now that you have set the foundation to provide your employees with the kind of meeting they deserve, there are a number of steps to take during the meeting to actually make it happen.

Let's get started

In the first place, always start your meetings on time. By doing so, you are not only demonstrating the importance of these sessions, you are also making timely attendance part of your department's value system. Even if it's quite subtle, the employees will sense that good things happen for those who arrive on time, while the outcome is less pleasant for those who continue to arrive late. In a rather short period of time, this will have a compelling impact on their behavior.

In addition, your behavior serves as a model for the employees, and the mere fact that you arrive on time is going to induce many of them to do likewise. On a deeper level, starting meetings on time further illustrates the fact that you keep the commitments that you make. When you start late, you undercut your credibility in this area and conceivably in many others.

Starting your meetings late sends a couple of other negative messages as well. For example, it tells the employees that they need not arrive on time. Further, a late start indicates that your meetings are not much of a priority, and that is how they will be approached by your staff.

This, of course, raises the question of what to do about employees who arrive late. The good news is that as you consistently start your

meetings on time, the incidence of late arrivals is going to drop on its own. When it is clear that meetings start when scheduled, employees who wander in late often feel quite embarrassed, and this is often all they need to get to the next meeting on time.

However, if there are some who persist in being unfashionably late, the first step is to try to determine why this is happening. For example, it is possible that the timing is problematic for these employees because of their work responsibilities, or perhaps these meetings do not cover issues of relevance to them. This can be handled in private conversations with them, and adjustments can be made if necessary.

At the same time, if you determine there is every good reason for these employees to be at the meetings on time, and not one good reason for them to be late, then they should be given some direct coaching on this matter. They need to understand the value of the meetings, your expectations in this area, and the consequences associated with continued late arrivals.

It is interesting to note that some bosses suggest locking the doors once the meeting has begun. This is one of those ideas that has instant appeal for some bosses, but with a modicum of thought, it is easy to figure out that it makes no sense at all. In the first place, what are you going to do about the employees who missed the meeting? It is easy to say "too bad for them," but frankly it is too bad for the rest of the employees and for you. Someone has to bring these employees back up to speed, and that can take a massive amount of time. Further, the culture you have established is premised on respect and trust, and the old lockout maneuver does not measure up in this category either.

Stay on track

In order to have a successful meeting, you need to make sure that the agenda is followed. This means that the discussions start and end as planned, and they stay on topic and on target. As the boss, one of your central roles in a meeting is to serve as a leader and facilitator, and one of your most important functions is to prevent the discussion from wandering into areas that are far off course. To keep the meeting on schedule, you may need to clarify some issues, summarize the points, draw some conclusions, and then introduce the next topic.

This raises the question of what to do if an employee brings up a topic that is not on the agenda. Many experts will advise you to set it aside and deal with it at a later date, and for the most part this is exactly what you should do. After all, the employees have already had an advance opportunity to provide their inputs regarding the content of the meeting.

Perhaps the only time that a new topic should be addressed is if it is a true emergency or critical situation that developed right before the meeting. Other than that, do not be lulled into adding new topics during a meeting, because the result will most likely be inadequate coverage of the new topics and the original topics as well.

3 basic behaviors

As you lead the meeting, you will be able to distinguish three distinct kinds of behaviors from the attendees. Being aware of them can help you target some appropriate feedback.

First, there are *goal-oriented behaviors* that are designed to help the group meet its objectives. Examples of these behaviors include refocusing the discussion when it runs astray, clarifying the objectives, and bringing in new ideas to help solve a problem. Obviously, you will be a key source of these types of behaviors, but you will find some of your employees demonstrating them as well, and they should be immediately encouraged to continue to do so.

A second set of behaviors can be described as *support behaviors*, and they typically help resolve interpersonal conflicts, keep the team together, and build bridges among the players. This is another area where you will play a key role, but you will find that some of your employees can be quite helpful in doing so as well. And, again, these are the kinds of behaviors you will want to encourage.

A final set of behaviors can be called *ego behaviors*, displayed by employees who seek to fulfill some of their own needs, often at the expense of others. Such behaviors include insults, dominating language, and even personal attacks. When you see this happening, you need to take immediate steps to stop it.

Take note of this

As a result of the discussions in your meeting, there can be new plans and goals, additional assignments, and expanded responsibilities.

This means that you should have one person in attendance with either a laptop or note pad who can formally document the new assignments, priorities, and deadlines. This individual should also prepare an overall summary of the meeting.

It's a wrap

When you reach the designated time for your meeting to end, wrap it up. After all, it is just as important to end your meeting on time as it is to start it on time. You have made a commitment to end at a particular time, and your employees may have made commitments to take various actions back on their jobs after the meeting. When you hold the employees over, you are breaking your commitment and forcing them to break theirs. Further, when they finally get to leave, they will do so in a rather negative state of mind, and that can easily impact their work and their co-workers. And none of this does much for building respect and trust.

After the Meeting

Even if you have just concluded the greatest meeting in the world, it is still important to take two key follow-up steps. By doing so, you will provide closure to the meeting you just held, while laying the groundwork for the next meeting to be successful.

What was noted?

In the first place, be sure that all of the participants are provided with the notes that were taken during the meeting. This will include an overall summary, along with the specific assignments, goals, plans, priorities, and benchmark dates that were established. This can also include the time and date for the next meeting.

A little feedback

On an intermittent basis, it can be useful to ask the employees their opinion of the meetings that you conduct. The idea is to learn more about what they like about the meetings, what they dislike, and what they suggest to improve them.

You should then devote part of a forthcoming meeting to reviewing their suggestions and discussing any changes you will be making as

a result. The employees' inputs can improve the quality of your meetings, and the employees themselves can get a real motivational boost when changes are introduced as a result of their suggestions.

It is obvious that great meetings don't just happen. They take real planning, organization, and a healthy dose of employee involvement at every step. By building your meetings on this solid foundation and then providing the direction to keep them on time and on target, you are truly giving your employees the meetings they deserve.

Section Four:
It's the People

$\mathcal{M}$any bosses today are quick to say that people are the most important assets. However, when the time comes to deal with people-related issues and problems, particularly some of the newer ones, such bosses are often unsure how to proceed. With recent widespread changes in employee attitudes and expectations, along with changes in the nature of work, the work force, and the workplace, many strategies of the past are no longer valid.

Today's work force is highly diverse, and being an effective boss calls for a real understanding of your employees as individuals and as parts of various larger groups. In this regard, it is particularly helpful for a boss to understand today's most common people-related issues, including work/life balance, the four generations at work right now, team-building, problem employees, and conflict.

It is important to add that the rules of the game in all of these areas have changed. For example, some bosses may feel that conflict on the job is a problem. However, as Chapter 20 demonstrates, conflict might not be such a bad thing, while the lack of conflict could spell real trouble.

All of these people-related issues are discussed in this section, because the more you understand people, the more likely you will become the boss they deserve.

Chapter 16

Keep the Work/Life Balance in Balance

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*B*y this point, it is apparent that one of the most cru-
cial elements in being the boss that your employees
deserve is for you to understand them and treat them as individuals.
This understanding influences just about everything you do as a boss,
whether it's communicating, leading, motivating, training, setting goals,
or evaluating performance.

At the same time, as important as it is to have a high degree of
insight into your individual employees, it is remarkable that so many
bosses seem to believe that this insight switches on when the em-
ployee comes to work, and shuts off when that employee heads home.
With this type of thinking, the boss has only a small piece of the pic-
ture that is needed to understand the employee.

The most effective bosses understand that their employees have a
life both on and off the job, and the more a boss provides understand-
ing, support, and resources in both of these arenas, the more focused,
satisfied, loyal, and productive today's employees are going to be.
That is where work/life programs enter the picture. They help the

employees handle their personal lives more easily, comfortably, and effectively, and, by doing so, they enable the employees to handle their jobs more easily, comfortably, and effectively as well.

The Big Picture

There is an entire world of work/life programs. Many have minimal cost, if any, and the proven benefits outweigh them by far. At the same time, this does not mean that a boss should strive to implement every work/life program ever conceived. Rather, the best step is to keep the communication lines open with your employees, discuss work/life issues, concerns, and problems with them, and then try to tailor some appropriate work/life programs to meet their needs.

Importantly, there are two key steps that you need to take before implementing any work/life program. The first is to be absolutely sure that any such program will in no way interfere with your department's operations, communication, or coordination. Fortunately, many jobs today can be done in many different locations and at very different times, without causing any problems.

The second step to take before plunging into the work/life pool is to be sure that any such program has your complete approval, as well as any senior levels of approval required by your company for programs of this nature and magnitude.

It's about time

With employees having so many off-the-job commitments, responsibilities, and needs, particularly in terms of childcare, elder care, education, and personal pursuits, one major arena of work/life programs is premised on time off from work. As a result, there is a broad array of programs to help employees in these areas, all of which are designed to maintain employee productivity while putting some flexibility into the time constraints.

Some of the more popular and effective programs in this arena include the following:

> ▶ *Flextime*. Providing the employees with a core of hours during which they have to be at work, along with a flexible range of hours during which they can arrive and depart.

▸ *Compressed workweek*. Allowing the employees to work a stipulated number of hours in fewer days, such as by working 40 hours in four days.

▸ *Job sharing*. Taking one job and typically dividing it between two people, allowing each to work the desired number of hours, while at the same time establishing a framework for all of the job responsibilities to be carried out.

▸ *Telecommuting*. Permitting the employees to work off-site, typically at a home office, while remaining connected to the company by phone, fax, Intranet, Internet, and e-mail.

▸ *Reduced hours*. Cutting back the number of hours expected of all employees, such as working a half-day on Fridays during the summer, basically to give the employees extra time for personal pursuits.

▸ *Part-time jobs*. Using a more traditional approach that permits employees to work less than full time in a given position, such as by holding a job half-time.

There is an interesting continuum of options associated with the actual time that an employee spends on the job. At one end, some companies provide "wellness days" on which an employee may be perfectly healthy, but senses that he or she needs some time to step back and smell the roses, find the forest for the trees, or just hit the road. At the other end of the continuum, some companies are providing sabbaticals that provide various employees with extended time off so that they can pursue personal interests and goals.

In the broadest sense, programs that provide employees with more control over their own time are one of the mainstays of work/life balancing. Although some bosses still believe that employees need to be on the job to do the job, this is actually an archaic and inaccurate view of today's workplace. In fact, employees who have the discretion that accompanies flextime, job sharing, telecommuting, and the other programs noted above often demonstrate higher levels of productivity.

Family Matters

There is an entire range of work/life programs that you can select from to help your employees with family-related issues, problems,

and concerns. This is a growing area, and bosses who take appropriate action within it are typically rewarded with increased loyalty and retention.

Many bosses claim that they would like to have a family-oriented atmosphere in their department or organization, but today this means more than keeping things warm and fuzzy on the job. If you truly want a family-oriented atmosphere, then you will need to have some programs that reach beyond the workplace family and into the employees' families.

Care for the young

There are many work/life programs that provide various supportive options related to childbirth. Such options can include pregnancy leave in excess of that mandated by law, adoption assistance, childbirth and adoption leave, childbirth leave for fathers, postpartum services including nursing support at home, all the way to lactation centers at work.

Another mainstay of work/life programs in this area is childcare. In order to meet employee needs in this area, some companies provide onsite childcare, while others have a referral service or a relationship with a nearby childcare center.

And when situations arise that require the employee to be at work, but there is a mildly sick child at home, the company can provide an approved care center or even a caregiver to help at home.

Care for the young at heart

At the other end of the family continuum, today's best bosses recognize that many employees, especially baby boomers, are now dealing with aging parents. As a result, various companies are spearheading programs that deal with elder care. These programs can include referrals, resource materials, and answers to many of the personal, financial, and long-term care questions that arise in this area.

Employees with aging parents can spend countless hours trying to solve the myriad problems that arise, and some employer support and guidance in this area is typically received very well. And when this occurs, the immediate benefit to the company is that the employee can focus far more effectively on his or her work.

The rest of the family

Another set of family-oriented work/life programs is focused on the employee's spouse or significant other. Rather than forgetting that an employee even has a family, some companies are going in the opposite direction and inviting spouses and family to work events such as picnics or awards presentations, and even allowing partners to accompany employees on selected business travel. These kinds of steps tend to build the family's relationship with the company, and can even help foster increased understanding within the family.

By opting for these types of programs, you are showing your employees that you are truly interested in them as complete individuals, not just as workers. By helping and supporting them on profoundly important family issues, you are doing far more than merely delivering some kind managerial verbiage; rather, you are delivering the kind of assistance they truly need, want, and deserve.

Innovation in Education

Employee education is another cornerstone of work/life programs, but in this context it is not traditional education at all. Rather, in the work/life context, companies support education in areas that seemingly have nothing to do with work. These can be classes in such incongruous subjects as scuba diving, horseback riding, golf, and rock climbing.

Yesterday's bosses would immediately think that such courses stray too far from the needs of the job to be supported or even encouraged by the company. Today's bosses realize that employees need some pursuits that broaden their range of experience, clear their heads, call for some new or divergent thinking, and help them work toward mastery of entirely new challenges.

Such courses, selected by the employees, tend to be inherently satisfying, and they help build the employees' sense of achievement, accomplishment, confidence, self-esteem, personal growth, and self-satisfaction. The employees typically return to work feeling relaxed, refreshed, successful, and often with a broader perspective. With such widely positive outcomes, one could easily argue that these recreational courses have more positive outcomes than the traditional work-related courses.

These programs help develop the whole person, and it is that whole person who reports to you. It is remarkable to see how many of those nagging problems at work can be solved creatively by employees who have been involved in recreational learning activities that have nothing to do with the problem on the surface, but everything to do with it on a more subtle level. And when these employees are finally able to crack their way through these kinds of problems, they sense far greater levels of accomplishment and satisfaction.

Here's to Your Employees' Health

As part of the work/life balance, there are also many steps that companies are taking to monitor, maintain, and enhance their employees' health. Not only is this healthy for the employees, it is also healthy for the companies, particularly in terms of reduced illness, absenteeism, and healthcare costs.

The range of work/life health programs is vast, and it can run the gamut from onsite mammography, cholesterol testing, vaccinations, and CPR training, all the way to onsite gyms or special contracts with gyms in the area.

Some employee assistance

Companies also take health-related steps for their employees through various employee assistance programs. When employees have personal problems, even if they emanate solely from situations outside of work, these problems can affect their performance, attitudes, and overall behavior on the job. When companies take steps in this employee assistance component of the work/life area, they are not only helping and protecting the individual employee, but doing likewise for his or her co-workers.

These employee assistance programs can provide your employees with professional help for any number of personal problems, including depression, substance abuse, anger, stress, and grief. An employee's problems can weigh so heavily that he or she is unable to perform at anything close to acceptable levels, further demonstrating that work life and personal life are inextricably linked. Simply telling the employee to leave the problems at home may have swept issues under the rug years ago, but bosses who try this approach today are going to have the rug pulled out from under them.

If you are truly a caring boss, and that is just the kind of boss that your employees deserve, then you understand that employees who are suffering from personal or emotional problems deserve your help to get back on track. Further, all of your employees deserve co-workers who are able to give their all when on the job, and that is all the more reason to help that struggling employee.

Many bosses today are quick to say that they care about their employees. However, these employee assistance programs not only demonstrate that you care about them, but you care for them as well.

A period of national grieving

In the aftermath of the horrific events of September 11, 2001, many excellent bosses demonstrated exactly what it means to be the boss their employees deserve. These are the bosses who devoted numerous extra hours to talking with the employees and listening carefully to them. These bosses encouraged their employees to talk with each other, and they brought in grief counselors for those who wanted more help.

Many of these bosses also implemented even more flexible scheduling so that employees could tend to their personal lives and the grief, anxiety, and helplessness that they and their families were experiencing. Numerous families needed extra time to be together during this period, and these bosses recognized that fact and readily accommodated it.

Regardless of one's religious affiliation, spending some time in a house of worship during this trying period was a source of consolation for many. This was an action that many of these bosses suggested and encouraged for their employees.

Further, these bosses encouraged and supported their employees in their desire to deal with their feelings of helplessness. In this regard, it was not uncommon to find these bosses working with their employees on blood drives and a broad range of fund-raising projects and activities.

At your service

There are many additional services that you can choose from as part of a commitment to work/life balance for your employees. Some of them include the following:

▶ Dollars and sense. There are many ways to help employees save money when purchasing all sorts of goods and services. For example, there can be group discounts in such areas as auto insurance, home-buying through preferred lenders, home insurance, and legal aid.

▶ That's convenient. There is also a large range of conveniences that can be provided at work to save the employees time and make their lives a little easier. These can be as broad as you can imagine, with a good number of companies already providing onsite banking, dry cleaning pickup and delivery, pharmaceutical deliveries, travel service, and even onsite massages. In fact, some companies have a concierge to coordinate all of this for the staff. Importantly, the time the employees save is typically time they end up spending on the job.

▶ Untangled by the Web. Many companies make a broad range of discounted goods and services available exclusively to their employees and families via the Internet. This can range from company-branded personal financial management programs all the way to discounts on any number of retail products.

▶ Let's get social. As part of the commitment to work/life balance, companies are also offering special social activities, such as trips to art museums and sporting events, along with the formation of company teams for just about any imaginable sport. In addition, some companies are making special efforts to link employees who share common interests, activities, and hobbies. These kinds of socialization events are not only an obvious source of team-building and fun, but they also tend to contribute to the employees' sense of belonging, bonding, loyalty, and camaraderie.

The Many Benefits of Work/Life Benefits

The benefits associated with work/life programs abound. On the most apparent level, studies continue to find that these programs contribute to improved productivity, satisfaction, morale, motivation, retention, and loyalty. But there are many less obvious benefits.

Empowered recruiting

Work/life programs can definitely help your recruitment efforts, particularly in light of the fact that at least some of the companies in

your industry and area are probably making strides in this arena. From the recruitment standpoint, some studies have found that significant numbers of employees regard issues of work/life balance as being more important than pay.

Energized employees

There is also a motivational issue that underlies these programs. For example, it is motivational for employees to have an opportunity to determine some of their own work hours, as well as to pursue additional areas that are of specific interest to them. Further, when employees see a boss making an extra effort to help them, many intuitively respond the same way when carrying out their own job responsibilities.

Diminished distractions

When time-consuming issues in the employees' personal lives are under better control, whether it's aging parents, childcare, personal financial management, travel plans, or the like, the employees are then better able to focus their full and undistracted attention on their work.

Unspoken messages

Without having to specifically say so, work/life programs by their very nature send some very positive messages to your employees. The mere presence of these programs tells the employees they are respected, trusted, important, and highly valued. These are the exact messages that are so important in the culture and climate that you have established, and this type of tangible reinforcement further strengthens your employees' ties to the organization and its objectives.

In order to benefit from these work/life programs, you obviously do not need to implement all of them. Rather, the idea is to take a careful look at your employees and your company, and then consider implementing the most appropriate programs or developing your own.

However, for any of these programs to work, they need one critical element: your support. A company can have the most extensive listing of work/life programs on the planet, but if the boss's attitude is that employees who use these programs are not highly work-oriented,

or if there are reprisals associated with using them, then the entire work/life program is bound to fail. And that boss is bound to fail too.

These programs have the real potential of turning your department or company into a place where people truly want to work. That is the exact kind of setting the employees deserve, and your wholehearted support of these programs will further demonstrate that you are the kind of boss your employees deserve.

Chapter 17

Be the Boss
for All Generations

As a boss today, you are in the unique position of dealing with four separate generations on the job: the Elder Generation, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Each generation has its own culture, values, standards, style, and expectations, and they all come into play in the workplace. If you want to have a chance at being the boss your employees deserve, you will need to have some insight into the generation that produced them.

Naturally, you will still need to understand your employees as individuals and to avoid over-generalizations, but if you do little more than scratch the surface of these generational differences, you will be left scratching your head when trying to manage them.

At this point, the work-related values, expectations, and standards of Elders and Boomers are generally well understood, but the reality is that you are going to be spending increasing amounts of time managing members of Generation X and Generation Y. In fact, the ground rules for everyone at work have already changed dramatically as a

result of the influx of these new players. And the changes are becoming more pronounced every day. For many bosses, this is uncharted territory.

4 Generations at Work

The diversity that comes from having four generations working together provides a great opportunity for unique collaborative efforts, creative thinking, and continued learning and growth. It also provides a great opportunity for conflict. As the boss, you play a critical role in determining which it will be. And the more you understand each generation, particularly the newer generations on the job, the better your chances of managing a department that runs in peace rather than pieces.

The Elder Generation

These are the employees whose birth dates span from the mid-1920s through 1945. The Elders are still in the work force in large numbers, but their ranks are obviously declining. As a group, these individuals tend to place a good deal of value on loyalty, long-term tenure with one employer, paying one's dues, working "the company way," holding onto traditional policies and rules, believing that the company will take care of them, adhering to fixed work hours and schedules, showing high levels of patience, respecting authority, being thrifty, and maintaining a strong work ethic.

The Baby Boomers

Generally regarded as the generation born from 1946 through 1964, the Boomers are the largest of the generational groupings, with estimates in the range of 72 million. They are still a powerful, though graying, presence in the labor force. As the generation that grew up with John F. Kennedy, Vietnam, assassinations, social unrest and upheaval, the Free Speech Movement, and rebellion against the Establishment, their attitudes at work became more focused on personal gratification. The Boomers will certainly work late, but, stereotypically, the reason for doing so is to pay for their Beemers.

Generation X

This is the generation that was born from 1965 through 1977, and estimates of its size vary but typically fall in the neighborhood of 50 million. As a group, Gen X'ers are viewed as the latchkey kids whose parents did not have much trust or faith in institutions. Gen X'ers grew up in a period of downsizing, reengineering, reorganizations, mergers, and layoffs, and they came out believing that companies do not take care of employees, so employees have to take care of themselves. Part of this belief system is that long-term employment is simply not worth it.

Gen X'ers were raised in an era of significantly increasing divorce rates, and it is generally theorized their parents were more interested in their own self-fulfillment than in child rearing. It is from these experiences that Gen X'ers' sense of independence and interest in having a balance between family and work have emerged.

Generation Y

Also referred to as the Millennium Generation and the Echo Boomers, Generation Y is placed in several groupings of years, with the most expansive including those born in 1978 through 2003. With estimates in the range of 60 million people, this generation is much larger than anticipated. Its influence in numerous aspects of life is already being profoundly felt, particularly in education, apparel, music, art, media, technology, entertainment, communication, and the workplace.

This is a highly diverse generation, with one-third non-Caucasian and three-fourths having working moms. They were raised with the Internet, cell phones, beepers, e-mail, instant messaging, palm organizers, and cable television. And they like to move as quickly as their high-tech gadgets.

It is frequently claimed that the parents of the Gen Y'ers used a more "hands-on" style than the parents of the Gen X'ers. For example, Generation-Y parents are typified as soccer moms, parents who prep their children for the right schools, and parents who typically have a high degree of involvement in their children's near-term and longer-term activities, plans, and goals.

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By having some additional insight into the burgeoning new generations, you can develop a much clearer picture of what these employees feel they deserve on the job. And by doing so, you can take some targeted steps that will help you become the boss that they and the rest of your employees deserve.

Managing Generation X

All of the strategies discussed earlier, such as the important roles played by respect, trust, recognition, and two-way communication, are essential in managing employees from any generation. At the same time, there are some related strategies for managing Generation X that can further build their motivation, involvement, and productivity.

In the works

Generation X employees tend to enjoy work that is challenging, meaningful, and of real significance to the department or organization itself. One of the easiest ways to dissatisfy members of this generation is to load them with busy work or anything that resembles it. They expect work that is inherently interesting and will truly help them grow, and they need to see the role and importance of what they are doing.

These employees respond well to assignments in the form of projects, and they like to have a good deal of independence and control over such work. They are typically very good at handling several tasks simultaneously, and they tend to enjoy work situations where they can move quickly from one project to the next.

By design

Many Gen X'ers bring a strong entrepreneurial spirit to work, and one important way to connect with these employees is to provide them with opportunities to act as entrepreneurs within the organization. As "intrapreneurs," they enjoy working in challenging positions that call for independence, creativity, autonomy, self-reliance, decision-making, and sense of ownership. They enjoy a healthy degree of competitiveness, and they tend to be quite goal-oriented. And once their goals are clear, they tend to jump on the fast track to achieve them.

A surprisingly high percentage of Gen X'ers envision themselves on their own at some point in the future. This again is a reflection of their independence, self-reliance, and entrepreneurial spirit, and it sends a message for you to try to establish ways for them to meet these achievement-oriented needs while working for you.

Dollars and incentives

Many of these employees are typically quite interested in moving on an accelerated path to financial success, and they need to see the relationship between their performance and rewards. As the boss, it is particularly important for you to make sure that your incentive programs are fair and that the rewards for meeting stipulated objectives are provided as quickly as possible. Employees in this generation do not respond well to deferred gratification, and you will definitely hear it if there are any perceived inequities in the pay or incentive programs.

Importantly, for many Gen X'ers, money is not the most powerful source of motivation. While it is certainly on the menu of desired items, many of these individuals regard personal fulfillment, growth, challenge, variety, and work/life balance as being at least as important, and in many cases even more important.

The more things change

When change is introduced, not only do these employees expect to be kept up-to-date and have an opportunity to voice their ideas, they also need to have an understanding of the way in which the change will impact them, especially in terms of how they will gain or profit from it.

In terms of the bigger picture, these employees expect to play an important role in the change process itself. They are often looking for ways to work more effectively and expeditiously, and you can expect them to challenge many of the traditional practices. You can also expect them to approach you with all sorts of new ideas. Bosses who are resistant to change will soon find that these employees are resistant to them.

Commonsense communication

These employees expect to be kept well informed on departmental as well as corporate matters, and they also expect a high degree of

involvement and participation in the decision-making process. They want to be heard, and two-way communication with you is of utmost importance. These employees are particularly intolerant of the dictatorial boss and political power games, and they tend to opt out of such situations rather quickly.

Part of the team

Many Gen X'ers enjoy being part of a team and having a strong sense of belonging. This is related to their interest in having a family atmosphere. As a result, they typically enjoy group projects, opportunities for collaboration, company teams, and shared events outside of work.

Education generation

One of the top priorities for these employees is their continued growth and self-development. As a result, an essential element in managing these employees successfully is to provide a broad range of training and educational opportunities, mentoring, coaching, and challenging growth-oriented assignments that help them move toward their goals. As you get to know these employees as individuals, you can tailor some educational strategies that will be particularly rewarding, satisfying, and motivational for them.

The meaning of loyalty

For most of these employees, loyalty is not measured in terms of tenure with any one company. Rather, Gen X'ers tend to be more committed to their own pursuits, interests, objectives, personal development, and careers. They do respond well to a boss who has a real commitment to their learning, education, and growth, and this can have a visible impact on their productivity and the quality of their work. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that for many of these employees, being independent is more important than being loyal.

These employees do not expect you or your company to take care of them, and offering to do so is not typically a source of security or satisfaction for them. In fact, the notion of spending anything close to an entire career with one company is viewed as inconceivable and even rather foolish. If they sense that their needs are not being met, you can expect members of Generation X to look for the nearest exit.

Work versus life

The issue of a balance between work and life is quite important for the these employees, and many of them sense a great deal of satisfaction and self-fulfillment through the pursuit of their non-work interests. Gen X'ers enjoy working for companies that have a bona fide commitment to such activities, and they can become disenchanted with companies that pay little more than lip service to the work/life issue.

While Boomers will typically work late, Gen X'ers often have something else to do, such as classes, gym, or some other planned outing. They tend to have more outside interests, and it is important for a boss to understand these interests and the roles that they play in the lives of these employees.

The physical environment

In terms of the office setting, these employees should have a high degree of freedom in setting up their work areas to meet their needs and tastes. At the same time, do not be surprised to find many of them getting a good deal of work done at home and just about any other place where a cell phone, computer, and Internet can be used.

Let's get technical

These employees are typically very comfortable with high technology equipment and terminology, and they seek organizations that are technically well-stocked and well-versed. When given the choice, they will opt for a company that is on the technological cutting edge.

Atmospheric conditions

Gen X'ers often seek a work environment that has a warm, friendly, and homelike atmosphere. They like a good deal of flexibility in terms of structure and schedules, and they also appreciate having some fun at work, such as through games, contests, programs, and humor. They can be expected to show major resistance to a barrage of rules and regulations. Rather, they enjoy a more casual setting that includes an open office layout, a flexible organizational structure, and a relaxed dress code.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the dress code pendulum is swinging back. With the burst of the dotcom bubble, many companies are rethinking their dress codes. While more casual apparel is here to stay, a growing number of companies appear to be heading toward policies that call for more conservative attire within the casual classification. The idea is that this so-called businesslike look will induce the players to take a more business-minded approach to their jobs.

Time to volunteer

A significant number of Gen X'ers derive special satisfaction from volunteer work, such as through community programs, social service projects, and professional committees. These employees respond particularly well to bosses who encourage and support volunteerism.

Managing Generation Y

While many of the strategies that work for Generation X can be very useful in managing members of Generation Y, such as the flexibility, work/life balance, caring atmosphere, two-way communication, and fun at work, there are some key differences between these generations and some specific approaches that can be particularly effective with Gen Y'ers.

Full speed ahead

One of the best ways to approach Generation Y is to review the strategies for managing Generation X, and then try to carry out each step 10 times as fast. If Generation X is moving at a rapid clip, Generation Y is moving at warp speed. They grew up in a world of rapid change and feedback, and they expect this to carry into the work environment. As you manage these employees, it is essential to remember that they process information quickly and want things at work to happen just as fast.

These fast-paced employees often expect to go into high gear as soon as they walk in the door. They want the choice assignments and responsibilities right now, including the so-called glamorous travel and the big bucks as well. In fact, these employees typically want it all right now.

However, this does not mean that you have to hand them the world on a silver platter, but it does mean that you should think carefully

about the ways to put these meteoric employees on a fast track and see if their initiative, drive, energy, and focus can propel them to their goals. If you approach Gen Y'ers as employees who need to slow down, pay their dues, and start out on some rather menial tasks, their impatience will propel them right out the door.

Designing and assigning

One of the most effective ways to work with these employees is to give them interesting and challenging projects with short deadlines. They grew up with all sorts of stimulation around them, and they tend to enjoy work that offers a high degree of stimulation as well. In addition, the notion of multitasking easily fits into their idea of stimulating work.

It is also important for them to sense that their assignments are increasingly important, and they enjoy being able to approach their work with a good deal of independence and creativity. They seek assignments that give them the feeling of working for themselves, and it is important for them to be able to see a clear link between successful performance and rewards.

In the learning zone

Gen Y'ers are also quite interested in having a good number of opportunities to learn and grow. They are in a rush to move their careers ahead, and they recognize that education is critical in the process. This further highlights the importance of having ongoing coaching and mentoring, as well as formal training programs. It is also important to note that these employees are particularly receptive to online training.

As part of the learning process, Gen Y'ers need and desire a good deal of feedback on their performance, whether positive or negative. They like to know how they are doing, and they want to hear about it as soon as possible. This feedback is not only valuable in guiding them to make the necessary corrections, but can also serve as a key source of the recognition that they seek almost constantly.

Brutal honesty

Members of Generation Y typically do not mince words. If there is something that they want you to know, you are going to hear it. In

fact, you may well hear more than you want. It is very easy for bosses to become defensive, argumentative, or even offended by their comments, but such a response will only engender ill will and more stinging comments.

It makes far more sense to keep the communication lines wide open with these employees, give them plenty of opportunities to express their ideas (which they are going to do anyhow), let them see that you are truly listening to them, and then try to take action on what they say as quickly as possible. Importantly, be sure to give them some rapid feedback on any steps that you are taking to deal with the issues that they have brought up.

At the same time, their openness does not mean that they merely blurt out every thought that comes into their heads. Rather, many of their ideas are creative, practical, and quite useful. This further underscores the importance of encouraging their openness and honesty, and listening to what they have to say.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that these employees are not going to be pouring any flattery on you. And, at the same time, they expect you to be equally honest and direct with them.

The odds are that the new employee who rushes into your office on the third day to tell you what he or she dislikes and even how the department should be run is a Gen Y'er. You could easily turn him or her away, but by recognizing that this is fairly typical behavior from a Gen Y'er, you will have a far greater motivational impact by truly listening to him or her and then providing some feedback.

Confidence abounds

Members of this generation are also known for their strong sense of self-confidence and self-esteem. You can see it in their demeanor, styles, and even their gait, and you can certainly hear it in their voice. As a boss, you can build on this characteristic by providing them with challenging, meaningful, and significant work that affords them the opportunity to sense a high level of achievement, accomplishment, and personal effectiveness and competence.

On stage

Many Gen Y'ers enjoy being in the limelight and having a good deal of attention showered upon them. As a boss, you can provide

them with assignments that offer the possibility of some real recognition for successful performance. Further, the recognition that you provide will have an even greater impact if you do so in front of others. By ceremonializing the successes of the Gen Y'ers, you are likely to see more of their positive behaviors.

Treatment that's a treat

Members of Generation Y have been treated with a good deal of respect at a relatively early age, and this has very important implications for managing them today. As a boss, the key factor is for you to avoid dealing with these younger employees in a condescending or patronizing way. It is particularly important for them to sense that they are regarded as colleagues or associates, not merely in name but in deed as well. They bristle at being treated as "kids," and they will show tremendous resistance for work that they regard as babyish, simple, uninteresting, or insignificant. Their reaction will be equally negative when dealing with a boss who operates in an authoritarian mode.

In the decision-making process, these employees will want to have a clear idea of the rationale behind the decisions that have an impact on them, and they will be even more interested in voicing their inputs in the process itself. They also tend to be on the lookout for ways that they will specifically benefit from such decisions.

As members of a highly diverse generation, they have a strong expectation that their differences be respected. They want to be treated as individuals, and they respond well when given support for their individual interests, pursuits, and even the cultural factors that may distinguish them from each other. For example, a good number of bosses have found that employees from all generations genuinely enjoy a regular program that includes sampling the foods brought in by employees of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Technically speaking

For the most part, Gen Y'ers are technically sharp and seek to work in an environment that takes full advantage of the most recent technological advances. They grew up with computers, e-mail, instant messaging, palm organizers, and surfing the Net, and they seek associates and bosses who are as comfortable in these arenas as they are.

Many of these employees believe that e-mail and virtual meetings are just as effective as in-person meetings, and they can be expected to carry out a great deal of their work by using Internet capabilities. As they sit through the meetings that you conduct, they are the ones who are most likely to get antsy, and you can expect them to be thinking about ways to conduct these meetings online. You can also expect them to approach you with that thought very soon, and it may be a good idea.

For many of these individuals, the Internet is where they network, learn, congregate, buy, sell, and stay on top of the trends, issues, and developments that are important to them. As a result, there is virtually no way for many of them to be comfortable, effective, or productive in an environment that is technologically behind the times.

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The diversity of four generations working under the same roof enriches the quality of work and life for everyone. With this intermingling of experience, expectations, and expertise, there are countless enhanced opportunities for innovative thinking, personal learning and growth, and higher-level problem solving and performance.

With your insight into the key elements that differentiate and enrich each generation at work, you will be in a much better position to understand your employees and then implement strategies, programs, objectives, and an overall leadership style that will be motivational and rewarding for all of them. And that is exactly what they deserve from a boss.

Chapter 18

Making the Team

Studies continue to find that high levels of teamwork and cooperation tend to generate high levels of productivity, morale, loyalty, and job satisfaction, along with marked improvements in overall decision-making and problem-solving. When employees sense a good deal of teamwork not only among themselves, but with their boss as well, they tend to focus more clearly on the objectives and devote increased energy to meet them.

In addition, when employees see that they are productive and meeting or even exceeding the established objectives, they then tend to sense increased levels of personal achievement, self-confidence, and self-worth. These are the exact feelings that employees seek and deserve through their hard work and dedication. And they are the exact feelings that you can generate by being a boss who continuously supports, builds, and reinforces teamwork at all levels.

What's in a Team?

A team is typically defined as a group of people who are working together in pursuit of a common objective. By looking at this definition more carefully, the first point is that a team must have at least two members who take cognizance of each other, communicate with each other, and cooperate with each other. They recognize and respect the various roles that each individual may play, along with the unique skills, interests, and experiences that each player brings.

The fact that the team is in pursuit of a shared objective implies two further points. In the first place, it means that a team is a dynamic entity. Once the motion ceases, the team ceases to exist. Second, it means that the team has a goal, and all of the members are in agreement over it. To the extent that the goal is viewed as meaningful, reasonable, and measurable, it will serve as a key source of motivation for the members. In addition to having a goal, most successful teams have a strategy that serves as a road map.

Without each of these components, you are left with little more than a gathering of individuals, each moving at his or her own pace in pursuit of individual objectives. If you picture a mass of people standing on the corner waiting to cross the street, that is a group. But if a purse-snatcher were to grab a group member's handbag and try to get away, that group could quickly turn into a team.

Within your department, you do not want people standing in the corners with minimal concern for each other. Rather, for you to meet your objectives and for your employees to meet theirs, you need to develop a cohesive, united, supportive, and cooperative unit that is working together and with you to meet the goals. In a word, you need a team.

A Horizontal and Vertical Issue

The communication, camaraderie, and support that emerges as a result of cooperation among the employees, also known as horizontal cooperation, can be one of the key factors behind employee commitment and loyalty. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear employees state that one of the main reasons they stay with a particular company is their co-workers, also known as their team.

At the same time, many bosses make the mistake of devoting a great deal of effort to building up teamwork and cooperation among the staff, without ever realizing that this is only part of the equation. The fact is that unless the employees feel that the boss is part of the team, there will be an underlying belief that all of the emphasis on teamwork is more a matter of convenience than conviction. If the boss does not actually engage as a team member, the employees will merely go through the motions of teamwork, while waiting for the boss to call the shots.

Not only should there be a strong sense of horizontal teamwork and collaboration across each level that reports to you, there should also be an equal amount of teamwork and collaboration on a vertical basis, with employees at all job levels truly acting as part of the team. By being communicative, accessible, involved, responsive, respectful, and supportive, you can set a strong foundation for both horizontal and vertical teamwork.

Accidental team-building

When a boss constantly proclaims the benefits of teamwork and cooperation, but remains aloof, condescending, or uninvolved, the outcome can still be a high degree of unity among the troops. But it is not the kind of unity that any boss would seek. Rather, it is the unity that emerges after a group of people have jointly undergone a harsh and negative experience. In this case, the negative experience is the boss, and the employees unite against him or her.

This means that your objective should not merely be to generate a cohesive and unified team, because you can do that by simply being an outrageous boss. Rather, the objective is to develop a multilevel sense of teamwork that includes everyone in your department, division, or area, and unites them in a collaborative pursuit of the established goals.

Building the Team While You Work

There are a number of programs that build teamwork, camaraderie, and cohesiveness among your employees while they are simultaneously carrying out their job responsibilities.

Inventive incentives

Many bosses emphasize the importance of teamwork, but practically all of the rewards and recognition they provide are based on individual performance. If you truly want to build teamwork in your department, you need to reward it.

This can be done on a formal, as well as informal, basis. Formally, you can put together teams of employees and jointly establish measurable objectives in any number of areas, such as output, quality, and customer service. And if the objectives are successfully met while maintaining the standards of fair and ethical behavior, the entire team is given the appropriate recognition and rewards.

Also on the formal side, you can let your employees know that part of the criteria on which their performance will be evaluated is their teamwork and cooperation. Employees who are making great strides in this area will have such behaviors noted in their files, and this documentation should have an impact on their future pay increases and promotions.

On an informal basis, as part of your role as a visible and involved boss, you may see examples of teamwork and cooperation in the various work areas. For example, perhaps several of your employees have congregated for a spontaneous discussion of their group project. Whenever you catch your employees engaging in these kinds of team-building behaviors, they should be provided with recognition on the spot.

It's a contest

Another way to build teamwork among your employees is to implement some contests based on group performance. Contests are often fun for the employees, and the team-building opportunities abound, such as through the frequent discussions of how the team is doing, how to improve, who needs more help, and what additional steps are needed in order to win.

At the same time, contests come with several caveats. For example, in a contest based on increasing output, the team may be so motivated and energized to get product out the door that quality, service, and even ethics go out the window. When employees start to think that winning is everything, it is not long before everyone loses. This

means that one basic first step is to make sure that winning the contest is solely dependent upon carrying out appropriate work behaviors.

When contests pit one area against another, there can clearly be a team-building outcome within the various areas, but overall teamwork and competition can be replaced with cutthroat competition. In fact, it is not unheard of to find employees from one area sabotaging the work of another, all for the good of their own team.

In light of these kinds of outcomes, it makes sense to approach contests cautiously and from a broad perspective. For example, rather than having areas competing against each other, the competition can be the entire team against last year's results or against an established level of performance.

Contests can be a great source of team-building, provided that their structure and rewards are perceived as fair and meaningful, and the only behaviors that generate the desired rewards are positive, productive, and ethical.

Let's team up

Another important step in the team-building process is to have your employees participate on various team projects within your department and with other departments. These teams can include employees from several job levels and any number of specializations. Importantly, if there are incentives or rewards, they should be provided on the basis of team performance.

By participating in these team activities, the participants work on bona fide job-related projects, while building camaraderie, competence, confidence, and cohesiveness. They get to know and respect each other as individuals, and the solidarity they develop in these assignments tends to carry over to their daily work.

In fact, there is a major trend that points to a growing use of teams for all sorts of assignments. There are some teams that are fully empowered to analyze various situations and make final decisions based on their own findings. Many companies are also using self-directed work teams that operate quite autonomously in a number of supervisory-related areas. Further, numerous companies are forming ad hoc teams composed of employees from many areas and job levels in order to help handle specific work-related projects or problems.

The fact of the matter is that growing numbers of companies are finding that teams improve overall decision-making, facilitate creative problem-solving, make a positive contribution to productivity, and also enhance team-building, cooperation, and overall cohesiveness.

It should also be noted that one of the best ways to get the absolute maximum out of your teams is to make sure they have a high degree of diversity. This not only means diversity in terms of racial, ethnic, or gender factors, but also in terms of age, experience, expertise, values, education, and the like. Numerous studies continue to find that diverse teams tend to be particularly innovative and productive.

Open-forum meetings

Another step that you can take to further build an overall sense of teamwork and cooperation is to hold regular open-agenda meetings where your employees can discuss any issues and concerns, ask questions, share ideas, and present suggestions. Depending upon size constraints and obvious workload and scheduling demands, these meetings can be held on a monthly basis, such as on the last Friday of the month, perhaps during lunch hour or later in the afternoon.

The ground rules for these meetings are quite simple. The employees basically can make any comment they would like, and there can be no reprisals as a result of anything they say. At the same time, you will need to commit to provide feedback on every issue, question, or suggestion that is raised.

These meetings present a great opportunity for the employees to get to know each other better, build some camaraderie, increase two-way communication, remove misunderstandings, and set the stage for increased cooperation. In addition, they offer an opportunity to provide the employees with some powerful group achievement and recognition, particularly as they jointly discuss and polish a suggestion to the point that it is ready for implementation.

At the same time, some employees are reluctant to attend these types of meetings because they regard them as a waste of time. However, that attitude may quickly change when they see that these meetings generate significant changes.

As a final attendance booster, don't forget the most important adage of all: If you feed them, they will come.

A few words from you

On a more subtle level, the actual vocabulary you use with your employees can have a powerful impact on horizontal and vertical teamwork. In this regard, if you find that you are frequently using the words "I" and "you" when speaking with the troops, you may be inadvertently sending a message that you are not really part of the team.

Whenever possible, you should try to cut back on the use of "I" and "you," and use the word "we" in their place. The change is easy to make, and the impact can be quite compelling. Notice the difference between the following two sentences from a boss: "I need you to get this project done by Friday," as opposed to, "We need to get this project done by Friday." The first sentence is void of vertical cooperation and sends an "I am the boss of you" message, while the second sentence reinforces the idea that you and your employees are part of one team. Your employees are going to hear the difference, and you are ultimately going to see the difference.

Building the Team While You Play

There are also a number of ways that you can build teamwork and cooperation when your employees are not at work. If the work environment itself is truly supportive of team-oriented behaviors, these off-the-job team-building activities can be quite effective. At the same time, if teamwork on the job is given little more than lip service, these outside programs can be little more than a disservice.

Be a sport

There are all sorts of sports-related activities that can serve up a number of advantages in the team-building arena. The options are quite broad, so it is important to have at least some understanding of the employees' interests before diving into any particular program.

For example, some companies implement employee tournaments in such sports as golf, bowling, and tennis. These can be a great deal of fun for troops, and although some of the sports are quite individualistic, the social interaction associated with these events typically generates a positive team-building outcome.

Another option is for companies to form teams that compete with other firms. These teams are an excellent source of cooperation,

camaraderie, and pride not only among the players, but among the many employees who support them and regale in their tales of victory and even defeat.

Yet another team-building strategy in the world of sports is to have special company days at various professional or amateur sporting events. While much will depend on whatever is available and affordable in your area, attending these events can do wonders for employee camaraderie. And further, your employees may actually learn something about teamwork by watching real teams in action.

Special events

You can also have a powerful impact on team-building by taking your employees to special off-site events and programs that have nothing to do with sports. They can range from company retreats and conferences, all the way to art exhibits, musical performances, and other special programs. In addition, a good old-fashioned company picnic, complete with three-legged races and pie-eating contests, can go a long way toward building teamwork and cooperation among the troops.

Turn up the speakers

Another off-the-job activity that can help build teamwork and cooperation is for your employees attend a workshop or speech given by a noted speaker, whether business-related or not. Granted that some of these programs are more hype than help, there is still a benefit associated with attending the program with one's associates, listening to some new ideas, and discussing them later.

Hands-on activities

There are countless team-building activities, games, and programs that you can implement either on your own or with the help of a professional facilitator. Obviously, before touching any of these hands-on packages, it will be critical for you to carefully check out their content, methodology, objectives, validity, and leadership.

For example, the best programs always include considerable time to debrief at the end. In fact, any program that ignores the debriefing element should be ignored by you.

The kinds of experiential programs that may help turn a group into a team cover a vast continuum. For example, there are ropes courses where employees may work with each other to literally climb to new heights, or they may use ropes for some creative problem-solving. In fact, on one end of the continuum, there are red-hot programs that call for the participants to walk on burning coals, all in the name of team-building.

On the less dramatic end of the continuum, there are any number of games that can teach your employees a great deal about themselves, their co-workers, and the best ways to work together. Some of these games include building houses with blocks, juggling balls, solving puzzles, going on scavenger hunts, and figuring out ways to survive under simulated harrowing conditions, to name just a very few.

Employees often enjoy this experiential learning, provided they can truly see its relevance and application on the job. With a thorough debriefing, plus on-the-job follow-up and support from you, these types of programs may help generate enduring teamwork, cooperation, and camaraderie.

Do some good

While going offsite and watching games, playing games, or attending various events can help transform a group into a team, there is another step that you can take beyond those noted here that can have the same positive outcome on the group, while doing far more. Because much of the value of team-building programs emerges as a result of the employees being together or working on a project together, perhaps the entire experience would be even more meaningful if that project had some real substance.

For example, instead of playing with toy blocks to make houses, you could provide an outstanding team-building experience for your employees by having them literally build houses, such as through Habitat for Humanity. Not only would this have all the benefits of a team-building activity, it would also have the benefit of doing some good for society. In fact, with the growth of employee interest in volunteerism, this approach could have an even greater team-building impact.

There can be similar team-building outcomes when employees feed the homeless, help harvest a garden to provide food for the homeless,

clean a canyon, and engage in other team-oriented socially respon-
sible activities. Many team-building programs make lofty claims about
their impact and effectiveness, but combining team-building with com-
munity service is absolutely guaranteed to have an enduring, motiva-
tional, uplifting, and unifying impact on any group that participates.
It is also guaranteed to be highly appreciated by those in need.

Virtual Teams

Many bosses wonder how to build a team when their employees
are in widespread geographical locations. While nothing substitutes for
face-to-face interaction in the team-building process, a growing num-
ber of companies are taking some high-tech steps to help maintain at
least a degree of teamwork among their widely dispersed employees.

Among other approaches, technologically savvy bosses are rely-
ing on teleconferencing, video conferences, Webcasts, bulletin boards,
forums, and similar approaches to stay in touch with their employees
and keep them in contact with each other. These technologies allow
the employees to communicate with each other in real time from any-
where, and to communicate on formal work projects as well as to just
socialize and share ideas on matters of mutual interest.

Although the employees may be thousands of miles apart, current
technology allows them to develop a strong sense of community,
involvement, mutual familiarity, and teamwork. And when they do
meet face to face, they can spend less time on superficial steps that
typically accompany initial encounters, and more time on substantive
issues.

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True teamwork benefits everyone in the organization. Taking it
from the top, your company benefits from high levels of teamwork
not only through the increased motivation, morale, and loyalty that it
generates, but also through the increases in productivity that typically
accompany it.

For you, there is great satisfaction in seeing employees at all lev-
els of your department collaborating and demonstrating high levels of
energy, commitment, communication, and mutual support as they

pursue the established objectives. And, on a personal note, being the boss of a highly cooperative and productive department will not hurt your own standing in the company.

And for your employees, there is the satisfaction that comes from being part of an effective team, not only in terms of the camaraderie but also in terms of the feelings of achievement, competence, and pride that come from the team's success. These kinds of feelings are exactly what hard-working employees deserve, and your emphasis on teamwork will help your employees experience them. In a word, your continued focus on team-building is another key component of what it means to be the boss your employees deserve.

Chapter 19

Problem Employees and Their Solutions

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*N*o matter how terrific a boss you may be, you are still going to encounter some problem employees along the way. These are the employees whose style, personality, or general work behaviors create varying degrees of difficulty for just about everyone who works with them.

The actual range of behaviors that can cause an employee to be labeled a problem is vast. For example, on the more benign end of the continuum, employees who are Non-stop Talkers can be classified as problems. At the same time, on the more outrageous end of the continuum, you can find problem employees who engage in such unacceptable behaviors as temper tantrums and sexual harassment.

By being the kind of boss your employees deserve, you are in an excellent position to prevent any number of problematic behaviors, as well as deal effectively with those that may arise. When a department has a communicative, accessible, and visible leader who spends time on the floors, the employees who may have a tendency to slip into a troublesome mode are going to be less likely to do so because they are more likely to be directly observed in the act by the boss.

In addition, by being the boss your employees deserve, you have established yourself as an accessible and responsive leader. This means that you are more likely to hear about problematic employee behaviors and antics that you may not have observed. Your employees are going to feel quite free to come to you to discuss problems they are encountering, even if one of the problems happens to be a co-worker.

When bosses are basically invisible, it is a standing invitation for their employees to play the worst behavioral cards in their deck. And when asked later about such performance, many such employees will innocently voice a combination of denial, dismay, and disappointment. They understand that because the boss did not actually see what happened, it becomes a matter of claims and counterclaims, with the boss not knowing whom to believe. This outcome provides the problem employee with that ever-so-popular political defense: plausible deniability.

No matter what the problems may be, and regardless of whether you heard about them or observed them yourself, it is very important for you to take some follow-up action. Depending upon what you learn and how you learned it, your action may be as basic as to observe the situation more carefully, all the way to swift and severe disciplinary action.

By taking inadequate action in these types of situations, the problem employee figures that he or she can continue the questionable behavior with total impunity, while the rest of the employees feel ignored and even abandoned. Over time, the problematic behavior tends to compound, as does the dissatisfaction for the rest of the staff who have to deal with it.

To be the boss that your employees deserve, it is only fair that you investigate problem employees, jointly establish a plan to improve their behavior, and then stay on top of the plan to be sure that the objectives are met. While the kinds of problems you will encounter can run the entire gamut from annoying quirky behaviors all the way serious abuse, all of them require attention and action from you.

Here is a sampling of some of the more common problem employees, along with the kinds of actions that today's best bosses are taking.

Non-stop Talker

Just about every workplace has at least one Non-stop Talker, and many venues have several. They can be excellent workers in numerous

respects, but they can also be a source of disruption, distraction, frustration, and general noise.

As a boss, there is not much you can do about whatever may be causing your employee to go into a fast-forward verbal mode, because this behavior is typically part of his or her personality, and as such is quite enduring. Nonetheless, when you see your employees struggling to deal with such an individual, or if you are struggling with him or her, there are a few key steps to take.

One approach is to deal directly with the symptoms and use some assertive comments and body language to indicate that you want to express a point or wrap up a discussion. This can range from a polite interruption to a direct comment indicating that the conversation has to end.

For example, when a classic Non-stop Talker enters your office or work area and sits down, it can be rather tricky to get this person to leave. There is always an additional point that he or she wants to bring up, often prefaced with a plea for just "a few more minutes" of your time. Of course, a few minutes for a Non-stop Talker can easily mean 15 or 20 minutes. You can stand up, walk toward the door, gesture for the employee to wrap it up, and even make closing comments such as, "Okay, let me see what I can do...." But this individual keeps right on talking. It typically takes a more direct comment to literally get some closure, such as, "Okay, thanks very much. Let's get back to work." Then resume whatever you were doing before the discussion started.

One way to deal with this type of problem in the future is to meet with a Non-stop Talker in his or her work area or office because you can always end the conversation by getting up and leaving.

However, rather than work with or around the verbosity, you may have a more productive result if you give this individual some feedback regarding the way in which his or her communication style is being perceived. This type of feedback should be provided as close to a specific chatty incident as possible, and your comments should be focused on the behavior itself, and not on some vague personality traits or any other type of labeling.

Rather than telling an employee that he or she is a chatterbox who needs to close it up for a while, it will be far more productive to describe the specific behavior in question and then ask the individual if

there may have been a more effective way to express his or her thoughts. You can let him or her know that although there are some good ideas embedded in what he or she has to say, they tend to be lost in the masses of information being simultaneously expressed. You can then specifically demonstrate the kind of language and presentation that would have worked better.

It is also important to let the employee see how he or she profits if there is some improvement. For example, the employee should understand that with improved communication skills, there is a greater likelihood for advancement and more interesting work and responsibilities. Let this employee know that you have confidence in his or her ability to improve. And, importantly, when you do see or hear improvements in this area, be sure to provide some positive feedback on the spot.

Screamer

An entirely different kind of problem employee is the Screamer. This individual brings a huge dose of emotional immaturity to the job, and, in many respects, he or she is not unlike the classical "terrible twos" that are described in most child-rearing books. Such 2-year-olds typically want instant gratification and believe that the world revolves around them. If they can't get what they want, they throw a fit. If they never grew out of this stage, they can get to the office years later and still throw a fit...or a cell phone...or a laptop.

This type of violent and dangerous behavior is unacceptable under any circumstances. It is rage, and all of your employees deserve a boss who deals with it swiftly and sternly.

If you have an employee who reverts quickly to a screaming mode, it is important to sit down immediately with him or her, review the specifics of the behavior in question and the consequences if such behaviors continue. In some cases, disciplinary action may be warranted on the spot.

In other less egregious cases, you can review the behavior with the employee and then discuss how you can help him or her turn things around. Although you are not going to change the deep-seated baggage that may be causing this individual to lose his or her temper at work, you may be able to have an impact on his or her behavior.

The idea is to jointly establish a plan to help this individual learn how to act with more control, patience, and self-discipline on the job, as well as to learn ways to reduce his or her anger, redefine it, and channel it more productively. This plan may include training, coaching, readings, and professional counseling. There are anger management programs that may be able to help as well.

While it is important for you to deal with the Screamer right at the point where he or she has boiled over, it will also be important to meet with this individual between the storms. During such periods, the individual will be in a less heated state and will be better able to discuss his or her behavior and think more clearly about the costs of continuing it and the value of making some adjustments.

Know-It-All

The Know-It-All is the person whose attitude is not merely one of "been there, done that," but rather, "been everywhere, done everything." This employee is quick to tell his or her peers how to do their jobs, and how to do just about everything else. In addition, the Know-It-All is quick to tell you how to be a boss.

On the surface, these types of employees come across as controlling and dominating. They are quick to identify and focus on the frailties and weakness of their fellow employees. However, beneath the surface, many Know-It-Alls are rather insecure in terms of their own knowledge, skills, and competence, and their outward behavior is simply a way to mask these feelings.

When you have a Know-It-All reporting to you, there are a number of key steps to take. On the one hand, you will typically need to use considerable redundancy to get your point across, as this person often has some fairly thick barriers that block what others are saying. A Know-It-All tends to be far more interested in his or her own comments. Do not be surprised to find this employee bringing out the exact point you might have mentioned minutes before. Listening is not this individual's long suit.

You will need to let the Know-It-All know that any form of intellectual bullying, whether in dealings with you or with his or her peers, is only going to undercut his or her own effectiveness as well as the effectiveness of the department. If you see this individual acting in an egotistical, domineering, or condescending way with the other

employees or with you, it will be important to provide feedback on the spot. Once again, the feedback should be focused on the behavior itself, and you should then try to model or demonstrate a better way to communicate the same information.

In order to further help this individual move beyond these counterproductive behaviors, let him or her see that you are a boss who listens to the employees and treats them with respect and trust. The Know-It-All needs to understand that you are more than willing to listen to ideas and insights that may differ from yours, as this type of intellectual diversity can truly enhance a department.

It is ironic that there are areas in which the Know-It-All may in fact know it all, but his or her style can be so grating and offensive that people are simply unwilling to listen. This not only riles the Know-It-All, but also does a disservice to the department and company at large. The Know-It-All should understand that if he or she is interested in being heard, earning raises, and being promoted, he or she will have to deal with others in a responsible and equitable fashion, and truly listen to what they have to say.

Complainer

The Complainer is an employee who is perpetually dissatisfied and feels a need to voice his or her concerns almost constantly. If there were nothing to complain about, this person would probably complain about that.

Constant complaints in an organization can be contagious. When there is one employee who keeps turning over rocks until something displeasing is found, it can contribute to a broader atmosphere of dissatisfaction. When this individual starts complaining to others, there will be some who respond with complaints of their own, and then the cycle continues to widen.

While it is obvious that your employees should feel they can come to you and voice their complaints and concerns, they need to understand the importance of doing more than whining. In a word, your employees should be advised that the complaint department is closed. However, they should also be advised that the suggestion department is open.

When your employees have complaints, you definitely want to hear them. But even more important, your employees should come to

you with some thoughts regarding the ways to improve the situations that have them so upset. With this kind of approach, your employees are still encouraged to discuss problem situations with you, but the real premium is placed on their insights and creative thinking.

Importantly, when employees come to you with their suggestions, they need to sense that they are actually being heard. In great part, this means that their best suggestions have a real chance of being implemented. Further, these employees should be provided with an explanation when their ideas cannot be implemented, along with encouragement to continue to look for ways to make improvements in the department and company at large.

This type of approach easily fits into an open, communicative, and supportive atmosphere in which the employees are treated with respect and trust. Besides, if complaints are ignored, they tend to increase in frequency, magnitude, and volume.

Toucher

Amazing as it seems, there are still employees who are rather clueless when it comes to following laws, guidelines, and policies relating to sexual harassment. As a boss, if you either knew or should have known about harassment in your department, but you failed to take appropriate action, there can be tremendous liability.

For example, if you have employees who are engaging in any unwanted sexually oriented behaviors, such as telling sexually oriented jokes, sending such jokes via the company e-mail, giving "massages" to the staff, or in any other related way are making the work environment hostile, you will need to take immediate action.

Most companies have step-by-step procedures to follow in these instances, and they can include an investigation, interviews, and application of clearly defined sanctions. Depending upon the specific harassing behavior, there may be automatic sanctions up to and including termination. If there is any confusion in this area, your best step is to go to your manager or the human resources department as soon as possible.

Failure to take action in these instances will undermine everything that you are trying to do as the boss your employees deserve. If this type of behavior is going on unrestrained, there is a complete

nullification of your emphasis on respect, trust, openness, support, communication, and equitable treatment.

The Big Picture

In dealing with any of these common problem employees, or with countless others whom you may find along the way, it is apparent that there are some steps that are common to all. First, problem people, if ignored, will not go away. In fact, left untouched, the problems that they can cause will multiply rapidly.

There are some bosses who feel that it is sufficient to simply try to solve these types of situations, even if the problem persists. Unfortunately, that is simply an inadequate response. When you encounter problem people who are interfering with the effectiveness, attitudes, and productivity of your department, you need to do more than try. You need to resolve the matter. This can take a good deal of time and energy, but it is nowhere near the time and energy that will ultimately have to be expended if the problem is ignored.

Another step in handling problem employees is to get them directly involved in the solution itself. This not only means providing them with feedback, but also providing them with the opportunity to play a key role in developing the strategies, objectives, and programs to correct whatever the problem may be.

A final step in the process is to make sure that you maintain a high degree of contact and communication with your employees. By doing so, you will be better able to track their performance, provide them with the necessary coaching and guidance, and identify problem employees early in the game. By taking immediate action to deal with them, the likelihood of their turning into major problems is dramatically reduced. By acting quickly and decisively, you are actually being the boss that the problem employees deserve, as well as the boss that the rest of your employees deserve.

Handling Conflict
with Confidence

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$\mathcal{B}$eing the boss your employees deserve does not mean that your department must run totally free of conflict. In fact, some conflict is inevitable in every department, and it can even be a positive sign. Where there is no conflict, there is no vitality, spirit, creativity, or passion. In a word, there is no department. As a result, in order to be the boss your employees deserve, you will need some conflict in your department, along with a healthy dose of conflict-management skills.

In the work context, conflict is a state of antagonism between individuals or groups with opposing ideas, interests, or views. While conflict can be a mild state of disagreement between the parties, it can also escalate into a wild state of disagreement that includes direct interference and undermining of each other's work.

Both Sides of Conflict

Research has found that there are costs and benefits associated with conflict in a company. On the costly side, conflict can undercut

employee attitudes, attention, satisfaction, and productivity. Employees are more likely to spend time focused on internal and external issues related to the conflict itself, rather than on the job that needs to be done.

Conflict can actually undercut productivity both indirectly and directly. For example, there is an indirect negative impact on productivity when employees focus on handling the stress associated with the conflict, rather than focusing on the quality and quantity of their work. Any attention that is focused on coping with conflict, as well as the time spent on developing ways to deal with or even "get back at" one's opponent, is time that is stripped away from one's work.

Whether the conflict is between individuals, cliques, groups, or departments, there tends to be a related increase in absenteeism, tardiness, turnover, and accidents. These are classic outcomes for employees who are under stress and who are experiencing dissatisfaction on the job, and they are a further drag on productivity.

In terms of a more direct impact on productivity, some employees in conflict will resort to interfering with the work of their opponents, to the point of withholding needed resources or even sabotage. Either way, the outcome is a combination of delays, damaged goods, and even defective products. Productivity is then further reduced as a result of the time, energy, and resources that are allocated to correcting these outcomes.

At the same time, some forms of conflict can also be a sign that employees are involved, concerned, committed, and even passionate about their work. If they did not care about it, they would not expend the energy to engage in conflict in the first place.

For example, when employees sit around and agree with each other on objectives, strategies, and actions to adapt to today's rapidly changing economy, that may be more a sign of indifference than teamwork. When employees are in a state of perpetual agreement, it often means that there is not much critical thinking going on, and the result can be some extremely poor decision-making. When you find robust discussions and heated disagreement, decisions tend be more innovative than in sessions where everyone politely nods.

This obviously means that conflict in and of itself is not a bad thing. In a word, your employees deserve some conflict. Of course, they also deserve a boss who knows how to manage it.

Behind Every Conflict

Conflicts can have a number of sources. Before developing your strategy to manage conflict in your department or organization, the first step is to try to figure whatever may be causing it in the first place. If you simply rush out to heal a conflict, it is not unlike developing a cure for which there may be no disease.

Who's responsible for this?

One major source of conflict in organizations is confusion and disagreement over employees' roles and responsibilities. When there are gaps in this area, the expected work is not done, and that is typically followed by blaming and name-calling. At the same time, when responsibilities overlap, both parties may claim a function to be their own. This not only generates conflict, but also needless duplication of work, plus nasty competition and comparisons.

Conflict by design

In some work scenarios, departments have responsibilities and goals that make conflict almost inevitable. For example, a sales team may be provided with some discretion regarding shipping dates, because the ability to ship quickly may be a key concession to close a sale. This is an important part of customer service, and the company takes great pride in this area. At the same time, the warehouse may have policies and goals to avoid last-minute shipping crunches and the errors that typically accompany them. Not only is there a great deal of stress for the employees during such periods, but overtime costs can become excessive as well.

The result is that when the salespeople do their job, and the warehouse staff do theirs, conflict is unavoidable. Their standards, objectives, and modes of operation are pulling in opposite directions, and the result is that these employees pull apart rather than pull together.

Heated competition

Competitive programs that pit employees against each other or cast one department into a match with another can easily escalate to a state of conflict. As the players increase their focus, intensity, and desire to beat their opponents, winning can become more important

than quality, quantity, productivity, ethics, fairness, and honesty. With intense competition, there can be powerful combative cliques, exclusionary behavior, sabotage, and ostracism.

A matter of access

When employees need the same supplies, equipment, materials, or other resources in order to do their jobs, but are unable to access them, the result is conflict. They tend to compete with each other to grab the needed items, and there tends to be a good deal of hoarding as well. The cause of the shortages may be any number of factors, such as storage policies, distribution systems, purchasing problems, inventory control, and the like, but this makes little difference to the employees. They know what they need to do their jobs, and shortages tend to make tempers short.

Also in terms of access to needed resources, employees can easily turn against each other if they sense some inequities in your availability. If there are strong limitations on the amount of time that you spend with your employees, there can be heated competition to get a piece of it. And worse, if the employees believe you are showing some favoritism in your accessibility, the distress and dissension can be even greater.

Mixed messages

Another key source of conflict in a department or company can emanate directly from communication by the boss. If your messages are unclear, insufficient, or open to broad interpretation, they can throw the employees into a heightened state of disagreement. They may argue over what you said, why you said it, and what it really means.

This typically occurs with messages that are not well planned or organized, and sent via communication channels that are either inadequate or inappropriate for the message itself. In addition, the chances of communication leading to conflict are further heightened when the employees are provided with neither follow-up information nor an opportunity to communicate with you to learn what you really meant.

Let's get personal

Sometimes there are interpersonal conflicts that have very little to do with work per se. Perhaps it's a clash of personalities, such as

what might occur when two high-control people have to work together. In other cases, the conflict may result from any number of factors, such as bias, questionable assumptions or expectations, rumors, stereotypes, and selective perception.

Conflict-Management Strategies

As soon as you are aware of any conflict in your department or organization, the first step is to try to determine its source. Is it merely another conflict between two employees who just don't see eye to eye, or is the conflict the result of questionable design, communication, programs, or policies?

Depending upon what you find, you can tailor your approach to best fit the conflict itself. At the same time, any of the techniques that you apply in conflict management should have a strong element of employee participation and involvement.

If you unilaterally impose a solution, things may work out over the short term. However, it will not take long for the conflict to return and to be even more intense. At the same time, if you do nothing and assume that the conflict will resolve itself, it will merely grow and spread until it gets your attention. By the time this occurs, a matter that could have been easily resolved in its early stages may well have blossomed into a full crisis.

In case of gaps and overlaps

If you find that a conflict is the result of gaps or overlapping responsibilities, you could easily sit in your office and do some redesigning. However, if you want to generate a more effective resolution, and one that is more likely to be accepted by the parties, the best step is to bring key employees from the conflicting areas together in order to discuss the problems and generate mutually acceptable refinements that clarify who is responsible for what.

Part of the agreement among these employees should include a provision that calls for them to meet regularly to monitor how things are going, as well as to make continuous refinements to assure cooperation, coordination, and peace.

Resolution by design

If your review tells you that your department's objectives and expectations practically make conflict an inevitability, one step that can be quite effective is to bring key employees from the affected departments together to discuss the conflict, identify the most likely causes, and jointly establish some specific strategies to smooth things out.

For example, in a convalescent care center, there were constant battles between the nursing staff and the dietary personnel, with claims and counterclaims on numerous issues, such as the timely distribution of the trays. Employees in each department contended that they were acting in accordance with established objectives. Dietary personnel would claim they were meeting the objective of getting the trays out on time, adding that nursing is creating problems by failing to distribute them promptly. The nursing personnel would then claim that they had other patient-care priorities to handle first, while adding that dietary is rushing and making excessive errors. As each department sought to meet its objectives, the conflict between them raged on.

Management had tried to implement all sorts of systems to correct things, but none really worked. At the same time, members of nursing and dietary frequently claimed that they could correct the problem. When management finally agreed to give them a chance, the nurses and dietary personnel met and ultimately implemented some highly productive changes, but still short of a complete resolution of the problem.

However, their approach called for regular follow-up meetings not only to fine tune their solutions but also to keep the communication lines open. Although the employees' plan to correct the interdepartmental conflict was less than perfect, the employees now had a way to meet with each other, discuss problems that had developed, and continue to make refinements. By continuing to meet and discuss their ideas and concerns, they were able to continue to improve operations while changing their mind-set from one of conflict to one of cooperation.

Revisit the competitive programs

If you determine that your competitive programs are creating an intensely competitive atmosphere, the best step is rethink these programs

carefully. While they can have a positive motivational impact, the pursuit of victory may come at the expense of teamwork, coopera- tion, mutual support, and departmental productivity.

If you are sold on competition, it is worthwhile to approach it from the standpoint of department-wide competition or even com- pany-wide competition. Because interdepartmental competition can easily escalate to interdepartmental conflict, it makes sense to have your department compete against itself, such as by trying to beat last year's numbers on various performance measures.

You will probably find that your employees also have some cre- ative ideas regarding competitive programs that interest them.

Open access

When conflict is caused by inadequate accessibility to needed materials or resources, the first step is to review the entire situation. In dealing with an equipment shortage, some bosses instantly resort to purchasing more. The problem with this approach is that the short- age may well be due to insufficient ordering, but could just as easily be the result of poor distribution, shoddy equipment, improper us- age, or theft.

You can also learn a great deal about the shortage of important resources by discussing the situation with the employees, even if they are in conflict with each other over the availability of such items. Employees often know where the problem is coming from, and they are likely to have some useful suggestions for its resolution.

Also from the standpoint of accessible resources, you are the most important resource for your employees. Because your inaccessibility can be a source of conflict, it will be important to review the extent to which you are on the floors, accessible to the team, and responsive to their needs. It is very easy to become defensive when your employees indicate that you should spend more time with them, but your defen- siveness will only escalate the conflict. If your employees say that they want more time with you, take it as a compliment and be there for all of them.

Unmixed messages

If you determine that there is conflict resulting from varying in- terpretations of communication from you, there are several steps to

take. Obviously, the first is to review your messages to make sure they are clear and understandable.

The next step is to avoid one-way communication, because it provides you with no way of knowing if the message you sent was the one the employees received. Two-way communication, in which the employees have an active feedback role, is the best way to be sure that your message is being correctly received and perceived.

Another way to improve communication is by having more redundancy in the process, such as by using several channels simultaneously. This can include a combination of memos, e-mail, and bulletin board announcements. And don't forget that in-person communication still has many advantages over all other forms of communication.

You can discover some of the most effective techniques for communicating with your employees by meeting with them and soliciting their suggestions. Some employees are more comfortable with highly visual communications, while others may be more auditory. Some need more face-to-face contact, while others don't need much at all. The more information you gather in this area, the better your ability to communicate effectively with your team, and the better your ability to reduce conflict.

One-on-one solutions

If you find a conflict in your department between two individuals who do not get along as a result of personality differences, one of the most effective approaches is to meet with each individual, listen to what each has to say, emphasize the importance of working productively together, let each see the way he or she profits through an improved working relationship, and then let each know the consequences of continued conflict.

These two individuals should then be encouraged to meet to discuss their working relationship as well as to establish specific strategies to help them work productively together. If they are unable to do this on their own, you should offer to sit in at their meetings and facilitate the discussion. In this role, you can clarify what each may be saying, keep the discussion calm but not overly so, have the disputants reverse roles so each can get a better idea of what the other is feeling, have each list the strengths of the other, and engage in additional exercises that can help open the lines of communication between them.

In this process, it is important for you to keep an open mind, keep your comments focused on facts and behavior and not on the players or their personalities, and be sure to avoid chastising, criticizing, and lecturing. By asking questions along the way, you may be able to get a better definition of the problem along with a clearer idea of the employees' underlying interests, and that can help you gently guide them toward a mutually acceptable resolution.

These employees should also be encouraged to develop a list of specific steps that they will take after the meeting to continue to build the working relationship. Their meetings should end with positive expectations and a mutual commitment to follow all of the plans that they developed.

As for the Future...

There are several steps you can take right now to help prevent conflict situations, or at least spot them in their earliest stages. The most powerful way to keep conflict at a minimum is to maintain plenty of contact and open communication with your employees. By doing so, you will be in a better position to observe emerging conflicts and take appropriate action to resolve them. In addition, you will be more likely to hear about potential or existing conflict situations as a result of your open communication with your team.

You can also help reduce the likelihood of conflict by implementing the kinds of team-building programs that were discussed in Chapter 18. The more the employees communicate, cooperate, understand, and respect each other, the less likely they are to get into a state of conflict.

Another step that is often overlooked by many bosses hits right at home. If a boss is in conflict with his or her staff or assistants, the message to the rest of the team is that conflict is a normal and acceptable behavior in this company. When there is conflict at the top, you are assuredly going to find it just about everywhere else. In a word, do not forget that conflict management starts with you.

It is also helpful to continue to monitor your policies, programs, operations, departmental responsibilities, and work areas where conflict is more likely to be found. Policies and programs change over time, and you may find that an earlier motivational program has gradually transformed into a highly competitive entity that now has the real

possibility of generating any number of interpersonal or interdepartmental difficulties.

Another important step in managing conflict is to make sure that you have some programs that actually reward teamwork, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Such programs can include recognition for employees who clearly demonstrate these positive behaviors, all the way to special awards for those who go above and beyond the call of duty. At the very least, when you notice any employee who has effectively resolved a conflict, be sure to give him or her some positive feedback on the spot.

A boss who either ignores conflict or tries to unilaterally mandate a settlement typically finds that the conflict expands, often to the point of drawing in the boss himself or herself. It is apparent that the most effective way to manage conflict is premised on a high degree of employee involvement, communication, and commitment. By using this approach, you will be treating the employees as adults and demonstrating a high degree of respect, trust, confidence, and faith in them.

In addition to increasing the likelihood of resolving the conflict, you will be building employee teamwork, empowerment, motivation, camaraderie, and a sense of achievement and satisfaction. All of this is what the employees want from a boss, and it is what they deserve from a boss. And it is exactly what they will get as a result of your highly participative approach to conflict management.

Section Five:
Passing the Tests

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*A*s time goes by, there will be situations that figuratively and literally test the extent that you are truly the boss your employees deserve. If you are going to be such a boss, that means you will need to do so under all circumstances. Being this type of boss is not a condition you turn on and off, but rather is a quality that indelibly defines you as a boss, regardless of internal or external developments.

It is easy to think that when the economy starts to drift, your commitment to being the boss your employees deserve can start to drift, too. However, that is not the case at all. As you will see, during difficult economic times, it is even more important and effective to be such a boss.

Also down the road, there will be times when you literally test yourself to see if you are performing as the boss your employees deserve. Because being such a boss clearly contributes to the success of your employees, your department, and your company, as well as to your own success, it is particularly important to monitor how you are doing in this area. If you let this monitoring slide, you may believe that you are performing in a way that is precisely what your employees deserve, while your employees may believe they deserve something better.

Your desire to be the boss your employees deserve is going to be tested in various ways. As the following chapters will demonstrate, you can readily pass these tests by making sure that you consistently approach your employees with a style that includes such elements as trust, respect, fairness, integrity, and open communication.

Look Before You Lay Off

During an economic downturn, the first word that jumps into the minds of many bosses is "layoff." The problem is that, although a layoff is indeed one way to deal with a financial crunch, it should not be the first move. In fact, by initially trying other options, you may find that there is no need to take the layoff plunge at all.

If you step back and think about what your employees deserve for their loyalty, commitment, dedication, and productivity, it is certainly more than a boss who automatically moves into layoff mode when times get tough. Rather, in such times, they deserve a boss who moves into a creative, insightful, and more flexible and communicative mode. While it is still possible that the only option will be a layoff, at least every feasible step to avoid one will have been taken first.

It is very easy to fall into the layoff trap. When people read about layoffs almost every day in the paper, the cutbacks start to be perceived as a normal, standard, and acceptable practice in the world of business. Now, when bosses raise even the most basic questions about

layoffs, it is remarkable to find professional advice that jumps right into staff reduction strategies without voicing even so much as a hint of other options that might be more effective.

For example, a boss told a would-be management guru that he feels badly about having to lay off a loyal employee who has performed well for several years, adding that he feels even worse because this employee's husband was recently laid off. Without missing a beat, the guru told this boss that he should put all emotion aside. After all, being a boss calls for tough decisions, and this is one of them. The guru then said that the situation is like a lifeboat, and because there are now fewer seats, some people have to be cast overboard. For the final shot, the guru said that it is not the boss's fault that this employee's husband was laid off, so forget about it and do the cutback right away.

On the one hand, it is possible that all of the guru's advice is necessary, distasteful as some of it may be. If a boss has taken every feasible step to save jobs, but the numbers still do not work, then there may be no choice but a layoff. However, by instantly opting for layoffs, the guru, and ultimately the boss, will be overlooking some alternative methods that could be far more productive and cost effective.

Layoffs Aren't Cheap

It is very easy for a boss to work the math and initially see the savings associated with a staff reduction of perhaps 10 percent. And even more enticing, those savings appear to jump out immediately, as in the phrase: layoffs today, savings tomorrow. However, that is not exactly how the formula works. You can have layoffs today and savings tomorrow, but you are also going to have any number of costs tomorrow, and for many tomorrows after that.

Look directly at the costs

There is a wide range of direct costs associated with layoffs. For example, there are substantial costs associated with the preparation of severance agreements and non-cash benefit packages, along with related notification and communication materials that typically accompany a staffing reduction. In this arena, you are looking at substantial legal fees, plus the fees for other professional services that may accompany the layoffs, such as retaining a financial public relations

firm to help put the proper spin for the investment community and general public.

There are substantial costs not only in terms of the preparation of the severance package, but in terms of the actual contents of the package as well. Typically, there is going to be some kind of cash payment to the employees, and, whether it's a week's pay or six month's salary, that money has to come from somewhere. And so does the money necessary to cover the cost of the unemployment insurance.

As part of the layoff process, many companies also provide outplacement services to help the displaced employees find employment. As discussed in the following section, having an outplacement program is an important part of the process, but the good ones are not cheap. In a word, plan on outplacing a good deal of cash for an outplacement program.

Look indirectly at the costs

There is a wide range of indirect costs associated with layoffs as well. For example, there are numerous meetings among all of the players involved in the process, such as the topsiders who are making the decisions and the various managers who will be implementing them. There is also a need to meet with the employees, not only those who are dearly departing, but the remaining staff as well. The time spent in these meetings is time taken away from revenue-generating work, and is thus putting the company even deeper in the hole.

The company's image is going to be impacted by the layoff as well. While Wall Street may rejoice and view cutbacks as an overdue streamlining, it can just as easily view them as a sign that the company is in much deeper trouble than anyone realized. Hence, the buying public may wonder about purchasing a product from a company that may not be around next year, and this can further undercut sales and revenues, which, of course, can lead to more layoffs and continuance of this cycle.

There is also the issue of customer loyalty to the laid-off employees. Some customers will no longer do business with the firm because these individuals are no longer part of it. Other customers will want to remain with various individual employees as they move on to other companies. Employers may be able to prevent that from occurring as

part of the severance agreement, but, naturally, that's going to run up the legal bills even further.

Survivors, too

It is often assumed that the employees who survive a layoff are happy, excited, and relieved. While that is how some survivors react, there are many who react with a combination of anxiety, guilt, anger, stress, and depression. As a result, it is not uncommon to find a measurable drop in attitudes, morale, motivation, loyalty, and productivity.

In order to deal with these reactions, bosses are encouraged to meet with their employees to discuss the current situation and future plans, and to let the employees vent their feelings. This is a good idea, but, once again, it is taking time away from work. Other companies go a step further and even hire professional counselors to come in and work with the survivors and try to rev them up again. Naturally, these counselors do not work for free.

Survivors are often concerned about how the work is going to get done with so few employees, especially with many arguably essential employees no longer around. The prospect of being stretched so thin, possibly beyond their area of expertise, and without the camaraderie, optimism, and fun that formerly accompanied such work, can paint a dark and dismal picture for these employees.

On the legal front

There are numerous legal issues that are linked to the layoff process. For example, if the layoffs in any way appear to discriminate on the basis of age, race, color, religion, gender, national origin, or disability, to name just a few qualifiers, then there is a likelihood of substantial legal exposure. There is also exposure associated with claims of breaches of contract and oral agreements. While it may be suggested that a condition of severance pay is that the employees waive their right to sue, that is yet another legal matter.

There is also the issue of laid-off employees disclosing proprietary matters with new employers. In order to prevent this from turning into yet another legalistic brouhaha, many severance agreements contain language that includes prohibitions against such disclosures. This calls for more direct and indirect costs associated with developing

these agreements, reviewing them with management, and then negotiating them with the departing employees.

And further, under the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN), employers are required to provide employees with 60 days' notice prior to a major layoff. Failure to do so can lead to litigation for back pay and benefits, plus penalties for late notification to the government. While there are exceptions associated with layoffs that result from unforeseen business circumstances, this Act is another legal consideration that impacts on the layoff process.

Credibility cutback

A reduction in staffing can easily lead to a reduction in your credibility, especially if the layoff comes without adequate communication or meaningful attempts at other options.

Without an open and communicative approach, there is a greater likelihood of employee claims after a layoff, as well as theft and sabotage as the process is being carried out. In this regard, one of the most common items stolen is intellectual property. This is not the old fashioned image of disgruntled laid-off employees trying to wheel a huge file out of the office. Now, they simply slip a disk into their pocket and they're done. The damage associated with this type of behavior can be very costly, as can the steps necessary to redress the matter.

In addition, when there is insufficient communication regarding layoffs, there is heightened dissatisfaction and insecurity among the employees who remain. They feel that they can no longer trust management, and that they can be laid off tomorrow. These feelings further undercut their loyalty, commitment, and performance.

Instead of a Layoff

Fortunately, there are a number of actions you can take before even considering a layoff. In fact, some companies only take these actions. Such companies make a major effort to adhere to a strong policy of avoiding layoffs altogether.

Sharpen the pencils

One of the most obvious steps in the process is to seek out any areas where costs can be cut. This calls for a careful review of your

entire operation, and a willingness to make the necessary adjustments. In this search, the essential ground rule is that nothing is sacred. Companies can often find substantial savings by cutting expense accounts, extravagant perks and benefits, bonuses, and travel.

Importantly, your employees are a great source of information regarding unnecessary or excessive expenses. All you have to do is ask them, and most will be more than happy to share their thoughts with you, especially because their inputs can help avoid layoffs.

Check the pay

Another step is to review the pay plans and practices. There may be a number of different pay adjustments that can save a good deal of money, and save jobs as well.

One of the most direct options in this category is an across-the-board pay cut. An example is a program that calls for employees at all job levels to have the same percentage reduction in their pay, such as 20 percent, starting on a given date. Many employees regard this as a fair option, and they often express appreciation regarding the effort that is being made to save their jobs. Such feelings can further translate into increased loyalty, commitment, and productivity.

Also from the standpoint of pay adjustments, some jobs can be put on more of a commission basis, while there may be other cases where employees are willing to have some form of a deferral of their salaries.

Jobs by design

You can also make any number of structural job changes to help cut costs while keeping the employees on board. For example, one strategy is to offer the employees the option to switch to part-time work. You may be surprised to find how many jump at this option. Obviously, when economic conditions improve, these employees are invited to return to full-time status.

Another approach is to implement a reduction in hours for all of the staff. This can be an across-the-board cut, or it can be a program of flexible hours in which employees go home when workload demands drop below specified benchmark levels. Another related option is the implementation of a four-day work week. And further,

some companies are offering employees voluntary days during the course of a month on which they neither work nor receive pay.

You can also consider implementing a program called job sharing. With this approach, you take one job and divide it between two people, typically individuals who currently hold such positions separately. By splitting the job, the costs to the company are dramatically reduced, the employees are retained on a part-time basis, and the work is completed by individuals who are fully qualified to do so.

Positive exit strategies

There are also some productive ways for employees to temporarily or permanently leave the company, and to do so in a way that is viewed positively by them.

One such option is early retirement for employees who opt for it. This type of program can include bonuses, incentives, or additional benefits for the employees who volunteer to do so. While this is still a staffing reduction, it is accomplished without the disruption, distress, and widespread disadvantages associated with a layoff.

Another retirement-related option is phased retirement. This voluntary program allows employees who are nearing retirement to gradually phase into it. This transition is accompanied by agreed-upon pay adjustments, and again is viewed positively by the employees because of its structure and voluntary nature.

Other related strategies include voluntary leaves of absence or sabbaticals. Importantly, these types of programs allow an employee to maintain his or her benefits and continue to build seniority.

These programs also offer an opportunity for a boss to show some innovative thinking, and, importantly, to work with the employees to develop some broader strategies. In fact, some of the most creative solutions in this area can be generated through discussions with the team. One example of a creative strategy in this area is a program that provides the employees with a reduced salary for a given period, such as three to six months, during which the employees work for a volunteer organization.

Time permitting

If there is no major rush to reduce costs, a gradual yet highly effective and non-traumatic approach is to place a freeze on hiring,

and then through a combination of voluntary turnover, terminations, and retirement, let the staff thin itself out over time.

In a word, a company can have fewer employees working full-time without having to resort to the trials, tribulations, disruptions, and costs associated with layoffs. By implementing some of these alternative programs, you can still reduce costs, but you will also be able to better maintain morale, motivation, loyalty, and productivity during the down times. And with these positive approaches, you will have the infrastructure in place to spring back quickly at the first sign of a turnaround.

When the Options Are Down to Zero

As a boss, you may find that you have done everything possible to avoid a layoff, but there is simply no way to continue without a substantial reduction in staffing. Granted that some still might say you have to bite the bullet even harder, it can be argued that a layoff is the only move that is left.

If you are at such a point, that does not mean that you can forget about being the boss your employees deserve. Rather, this is a real opportunity to demonstrate that you are just such a boss. And the best way to show it is to have any layoff accompanied by a full outplacement program.

The place of outplacement

Outplacement is a formal program that provides the employees with the help, guidance, preparation, support, and resources to find a suitable new job. This program can be run by your human resources staff, assuming they are trained in this area, or it can be handled by outside specialists.

The key elements

An outplacement program typically starts with a professional assessment of the laid-off employee. Through testing and interviewing, a trained specialist can gather information needed to develop a customized plan to help each laid-off individual not merely get back to work, but get to the right work.

Outplacement can actually include a broad range of support activities. For example, on a psychological level, these programs can include counseling sessions to help people handle the stress, shock, grief, anger, and personal devastation associated with being laid off. If people enter the job market without having reached a state of acceptance and understanding of what happened, they can undercut a job interview from the first hello.

On a career planning level, these programs typically include specialists who provide the participants with training and direct support in all aspects of the job-search process. Through individual guidance, and in some cases through workshops and seminars, the participants learn how to network, deal with agencies, use the Internet, understand ads and respond effectively to them, write a resume and cover letter, present oneself effectively in a job interview, and even how to negotiate a salary and benefits package.

When employees have been laid off, they need to approach the job search as if it were their full-time job. As a result, outplacement services typically include an office that the individual can use as a daily base of operations. This also includes computers, e-mail, voice mail, copying services, and any other means of tangible support to help the job-seeker.

Benefits all around

Outplacement benefits the laid-off employees in many ways, not only in terms of helping them handle the stress of layoffs, but also in terms of building their confidence and skills, pointing them in the right direction, and helping them land a satisfying job.

Beyond the direct benefits to the laid-off employees, these programs also help maintain their goodwill, and that can be very important when financial conditions turn around. Employees' final experiences at the company will ultimately be the lasting memories that they carry with them. When the final days are perceived as unfair, harsh, or cruel, that will be the permanent image of the company for them. If you ever need these employees down the road for possible employment, referrals, or business, do not plan on a positive reception. At the same time, many of the negative attitudes generated by layoffs can be quelled by an effective outplacement program.

Part of what it means to be the boss your employees deserve is to treat your employees as customers. And now that various employees have become former employees, they may literally be customers. The goodwill you maintained through the outplacement program, as well as through the way you treated them throughout their tenure, may indeed be good for business. As a further side note, it has also been found that laid-off employees who participated in outplacement programs tend to be less likely to engage in litigation with their former employers.

An outplacement program also shows your remaining employees that you are a boss of your word. All along you have expressed a philosophy of respect, trust, care, support, and fairness, and a solid outplacement program further proves the point. In addition, such a program can help ease some of the feelings of anxiety, guilt, and distress sensed by the remaining employees.

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The concept of being the boss your employees deserve does not slow down just because the economy slows down. Rather, during such a period, you have a real opportunity to demonstrate you are indeed that boss. One key way to do this is to ignore the herds of companies that stampede right into layoffs, and instead take a more independent, creative, and positive approach by seriously considering the alternatives to layoffs.

It is relatively easy to commit to being the boss your employees deserve during boom times. Keeping that same commitment during the rest of the time is at the core of what it means to be the boss your employees deserve.

Checking Up on Yourself

$\mathcal{I}$t is rather easy to "talk the talk" and convince yourself that you are indeed the boss your employees deserve. You can wax eloquent about having a philosophy that is premised heavily on respect and trust, and then go about your business.

The only problem is that your talk might be in error. Without a real effort to get some feedback on your performance as a boss, it is entirely possible that you think you are the boss your employees deserve, while they wonder what in the world they did to deserve a boss like you.

Sooner or later, you will find out whether your style as a boss is working. If it is not quite up to par, you are likely to see problems in such areas as productivity, turnover, teamwork, morale, and motivation. When this occurs, a boss is forced to move into a reactive mode and try to put out the various fires that have erupted. This quickly becomes frustrating, stressful, and counterproductive for all of the players involved.

Fortunately, the final step in becoming the boss your employees deserve has a real likelihood of preventing these kinds of problems,

or at least reducing their frequency and magnitude. This step is to regularly gather feedback from your employees to monitor the extent that you are actually operating as the boss they deserve.

You can do this in any number of ways, ranging from informal discussions, all the way to written questionnaires or online surveys. One of the advantages of the written/online approach over the discussion approach is that the employees can respond anonymously, and this is likely to give you more accurate data. The actual choice you make will depend on the work situation itself, your relationship with your employees, and the resources available.

Self-assessment Questions

To help get some insight in this area, the following is a sampling of the kinds of questions you can ask your employees about yourself. You can make the process as formal or informal as you like, pick and choose the questions that seem to fit, fine-tune the questions to match your needs and survey technique, and develop additional questions that tie into the specifics of your work situation.

❑ Do you feel that you are being treated with respect and trust?

❑ Do you sense that any of our policies are out of date or out of touch?

❑ Do you have a clear vision of what we're trying to be?

❑ Are ethics a top priority here?

❑ How much value is placed on innovation and creative thinking?

❑ How satisfied are you with the level of interest being shown in your growth and development?

❑ Do you sense that your interests, needs, and objectives are understood?

❑ To what extent do you view me as accessible, available, and responsive to your questions and concerns?

❑ Do you have enough opportunities to voice your ideas and suggestions?

❑ Do you believe that the rewards you receive are based on merit?

❑ Is the work atmosphere warm, friendly, and supportive?

❑ Do you receive adequate recognition when due?

❑ Are you satisfied with our recognition programs and events?

❑ Do you have a clear idea of the objectives for your job and for the company?

❑ How satisfied are you with the opportunities to present your thoughts and ideas in the decision-making process?

❑ Are people treated fairly here?

❑ Are you being kept well-informed on issues, changes, and developments?

❑ Is change resisted or embraced here?

❑ Is there enough flexibility here to meet the employees' needs?

❑ Do you believe that your ideas are being heard?

❑ Do you have enough autonomy and independence to do your job?

❑ Is there a positive and optimistic attitude around here?

❑ How much teamwork do you see here?

❑ How satisfied are you with the way new employees are being hired?

❑ What is your opinion of the training you have received here?

❑ How do you feel about the orientation for new employees?

❑ Do you have a clear idea of your performance and the progress you are making?

❑ Are there areas in which you need additional resources or support to get your job done?

❑ How satisfied are you with the amount of contact and communication that you have with me?

❑ How satisfied are you with the coaching I have given you?

❑ Are our meetings well-organized and effective?

❑ How satisfied are you with the level of emphasis that is being placed on employee diversity?

❑ What do you think of the way that conflict is managed here?

❑ Do you sense that actions are taken quickly when problems develop?

❑ How much consideration is given to your needs when changes or adjustments are being made?

In the Final Analysis

While it is all well and good to gather this kind of information, none of it will be of any use unless you take the time to review what you have learned, and, more important, take some corrective action to deal with the problem areas. It will be equally important to provide your employees with updates regarding the steps you will be taking to deal with the concerns that they voiced.

By incorporating the steps noted throughout this book, everybody wins:

> Your employees win because they will experience higher levels of satisfaction, productivity, achievement, camaraderie, and personal growth and development.
>
> Your company wins because the increases in productivity, loyalty, and skills among your employees will measurably contribute to the success of the company itself.
>
> And you win on several levels. First, you will experience the satisfaction that comes from building a solid and productive team. Most bosses have strong needs for achievement, and this is one important way to fulfill them. Second, as part of this process, you will continue to undergo considerable personal growth and development, and there is obvious great satisfaction associated with that. Finally, by developing a highly skilled and well-oiled team, you will have increased your own chances for advancement.

As you truly become the boss your employees deserve, you will experience a broad range of satisfaction. And that is exactly what you deserve.

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About the Author

Ken Lloyd, Ph.D., is a recognized management consultant specializing in organizational behavior. A well-known public speaker and executive coach, Dr. Lloyd works with a broad range of companies in the areas of management development, organizational change, and communications. His nationally syndicated workplace advice column runs in newspapers across the United States and in Canada, and he has made numerous radio and television appearances, including segments on *Good Morning America* and CNN. He authored the very popular *Jerks at Work: How to Deal with People Problems and Problem People* and the *K.I.S.S. Guide to Selling*, and he is co-author of the highly successful *Unlimited Selling Power: How to Master Hypnotic Selling Skills*. Dr. Lloyd is a member of the American Psychological Association and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology.