

America needs to rethink its priorities, reaffirm the old Protestant work ethic, and use basic common sense management. This article focuses on some of today's management problems. It provides suggestions to improve productivity and profitability without sacrificing the employee.

BASIC COMMON SENSE BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Death, taxes, and change are inevitable! Everything on this planet changes. Changes may be a gradual evolution, like rocks changing from metamorphic to sedimentary. Other changes are faster and more apparent, like weight gain or gray hair. Business changes, however, are substantially faster, like computer upgrades or reorganizations. Generally, our employment changes are revolutionary and occur exponentially faster in comparison to our slower and evolutionary physical changes. Yet, we as a species, absorb change at different speeds because we are creatures of habit. For example, our circadian rhythm, a biological clock, tells us it is time to stop sleeping and we wake up in the morning before the alarm clock rings. We generally eat the same things for breakfast, we generally wear the same styles of clothing, we generally do the same sorts of activities year in and out. Most people like consistency and do not like radical change. Business should consider this advice.

Dr. Jean Woolsey, a professor at the Colorado School of Mines, is a very successful global consultant. He clearly understands management's reluctance to change their personnel philosophy. In his consulting work, regardless of the perceived reason that requires his assistance, his strategy is to start at the bottom of the organization and talk to the workers. He predicts with uncanny accuracy that the workers will eventually tell him the real nature and cause of the problem, and invariably offer him workable solutions to these problems. Ironically, these are usually the very same solutions originally posed by the workers and subsequently ignored by management. Once Dr. Woolsey informs management of his recommendations, management will then embrace these changes, pay for consulting fees, and ultimately profit from the improved change. This kind of behavior is quite common, to be sure, but it is particularly prevalent in the business world. Most people witness this reaction at one time or another in our own careers. This behavior, however, does beg the question: why?

Part of the answer rests with the unconscious manner in which many managers in contemporary upper and mid-level management positions continue to view their employees--with an Industrial Revolution mentality. Consider the notion championed by Frederick Taylor at the turn of the 20th Century in which the worker was literally considered ignorant. The function of mid-level managements in those halcyon days was to translate upper management guidance into work-related instructions. This "translation" was both literal and figurative. In other words, the primary task of mid-level management in the early industrial era was to translate work instructions from English to German, or French, or any other form of the immigrant vernacular. To our detriment, and to

our recent dismay, we have lost sight of the role played out in an earlier era by mid-level managers, but still exercised, if not unconsciously, in our present reality. To this day, American firms tend to retain an excessive mid-management tier that tends to depress profit margins. As a reaction, in the past decade companies have been cutting mid-managers to compensate for the loss in profitability. Furthermore, the worker, too, is often marginalized and segregated in the classic hierarchy of business.

American companies have numerous options at their disposal designed to distinguish individual, and collective, employee status usually based upon where one fits in the hierarchy. For example, a worker receives a living wage, whereas a manager is salaried. All who manage receive certain privileges, but only upper-tier managers receive executive perks. In this, and numerous other ways, the hoi polloi can be distinguished from the elite. The middle tier, referred to as mid-level management, continues to serve as the buffer between the common worker and the Boardroom, just as it did in the early days of the Industrial Revolution. In modern America's politically correct society, we dare not hint at the possibility that the elite wishes to remain aloof from the masses. Yet, the manner in which the average American business continues to conduct its business, apply its hierarchical privileges, and ignore bottom-up recommendations for improvement, suggests otherwise.

As mid-managers departed, the organization suffered in subtle ways. The organization suffered indirectly from the loss of specialized experience. Since mid-level managers had historically been the buffer between upper-level management and the workforce, trust also began to suffer in many organizations. It did not help matters that upper management had always been primarily concerned with profitability and as a consequence often failed to consider the human side of management. The mantra was: competition is healthy and will likely continue as long as products and services exist. However, competition need not be detrimental to the workforce. In fact, the workforce should be an asset in competition. Simple common sense management can be extremely important to business. As an illustration of common sense management, consider the following example.

Few hotels can match the amenities and price of the Best Western Golden Sails Hotel in Long Beach, CA. In 1990, the new management of the Golden Sails surveyed thousands of government guests. They determined what was important to the government traveler and subsequently made those accommodations available. At the government per diem rate of \$99 per day, the Golden Sails is the best value in the competitive Long Beach area. The price includes: free breakfast, lunch, and dinner; free evening Hors D' Oeuvres; two complimentary drinks per day; a refrigerator in every room; free golf (including clubs); a computer center; pool, spa, and workout room. For groups, the hotel also provides complimentary meeting spaces. The enthusiastic staff strives to

keep customers first. Yet, the real secret behind this commendable service is common sense management.

Unlike other hotels where ownership and management rotate like a revolving door, the Golden Sails remains stable. As other hotels change management, employee jobs and salaries often change, too. Because the ownership and management of Golden Sails has remained constant over the last decade, employees trust management. Familiarity can in fact breed respect. Those employees who have worked at other hotels in the area, know and report the fundamental difference between Golden Sails management and its rivals. For example, length of time on the job, a fundamental indicator of job satisfaction, averages over ten years, and in many cases, upwards of twenty years plus. Employees like the fact that they are multi-tasked, permitting them as workers to thrive in their work environment. The staff respect one other, consider themselves members of an extended family, and in general, enjoy an excellent and healthy working relationship. In the opinion of the authors, management stability is the underlying factor to the success enjoyed by Golden Sails.

Ironically, management stability is seldom considered a tangible asset in corporate America. In fact, the normal pattern for upper-level progression defies stability, for the norm is to move around and up corporate ladders. In short, good common sense management goes hand in hand with stable managers, their employees, the client, and the bottom line. The message here is: he who seeks a profitable "bottom line" you first seek stability in management. One additional criterion ought to be considered before closing the book on this chapter. Good, common sense hiring practices can pose a significant challenge in its own right and can form the foundation for a stable work environment, whether searching for the right management or the right employees. As an illustration of good hiring practices, consider the following example.

Susan Devlin, General Manager of the Comfort Inn & Suites in Warner Robins, Georgia, has a practical method of hiring enthusiastic employees. First, she scrutinizes the appearance of candidates' applications for neatness and legibility. Second, she rank-orders each application based upon the characteristic of neatness. Third, she conducts a preliminary telephone interview with each prospective candidate. By this time, Susan has a good idea who would be right for an interview. Finally, during the personal interview, Susan has the ability to get people to relax and to talk freely about themselves. During an interview, she asks fairly standard questions about previous jobs, old job dissatisfaction, and personal likes and dislikes, but her motive is to gain some subtle insights as to how a candidate might potentially react in the new job. Based upon all these factors, Susan makes her decision on which candidate to hire. Susan's attention to detail usually pays off because employees are enthusiastic about their work, customers are pleasantly surprised by the positive attitude of her employees, and the result is service beyond compare and second to none.

It is our view that basic management awareness skills should include teaching respect for employees and trusting their judgment. If provided in a sincere way, the respect and trust offered downward will be reciprocated upwards by the workers. These simple, but important, changes to the management-employee relationship will pay big dividends: employees will begin to take a vested interest in the ownership of the organization and they will find - and fix - problems with the product or service exercising their own initiative. In the final analysis, this is a win-win situation for all concerned: the corporation benefits financially and its employees serve in a viable enterprise that respects the dignity and worth of its most important contributing participant – the worker. In an increasingly fast paced and ever changing world, human relationships still depend upon the slow pace of time that encourages familiarity, comfort and mutual respect.

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