

Inform your workers

“We never know what’s really going on!” It’s a complaint that likely will never disappear. Members of the workforce will always need or want information that doesn’t get to them for a variety of well-intended reasons.

First, recognize that not all information is appropriate for everyone to know. Some information is just not appropriate for dissemination. Second, admit that in all likelihood more information can and should be distributed to the workforce. The burden for this does not have to rest on the shoulders of leadership, managers and supervisors alone. There are viable and capacity-developing alternatives. Here are five.

Invite non-supervisors to management meetings. Members of the workforce desperately need a firsthand education on the myriad of concerns discussed at management meetings. Too often managers and supervisors filter the information discussed, thinking that the workforce just doesn’t need to know. Often the “need” may not be apparent, but the “want to know” is paramount to many. In the absence of information on some topics, the workforce has a way of filling the void with rumors. Insist that those who attend the meeting write a paper for distribution. Initially, both the management team and those selected to attend may be uncomfortable, but from this discomfort capacity will develop – capacity to understand topics from a different perspective, and capacity to disseminate needed and wanted information.

Push down decision-making. Informed members of the workforce can make some decisions that are otherwise a supervisory or management prerogative. Start with just one decision category and expand it to as many as practical. Release decision-making to groups of informed and responsible members of the workforce. The value of pushing decisions to those outside the traditional lines of authority is that more people become prepared to make decisions and learn from them.

Upgrade training opportunities. Most training opportunities are limited to the incumbent of specific positions. Open the door to others in the workforce who directly support those incumbents. This is more than cross training; it’s capacity development. The organization ends up with another informed employee and the employees end up with an added resource upon which to call if the need arises. Front-line employees attending man-

agement training provides an environment for everyone to learn a new perspective.

Survey and feed back regularly. It’s hard to find a Web site that doesn’t conduct a daily survey and

instantly post the responses. It might be a good idea to ask one question each week that would help workforce and management alike do their work more effectively. Posting the results immediately and outlining what, if anything, will be done differently shows a high level of responsiveness. Organizations that use employee surveys effectively do better at developing employee good will than those who do not use this tested technique.

Incorporate a personal touch. Schedule face-time with a workforce member regularly. Make it a point to calendar time with someone in the workforce on a regular basis (several times a week). Encourage questions from the individual and ask them to bring questions with them from their associates. Insist that answers be carried back to the originator after the meeting (lunch, walk-around, working-break, etc.). Follow up with a personal handwritten note after the meeting. That’s the number-one most impressive thing you can do – send a personal handwritten note of thanks.

What can you expect if you engage in any of these activities? Relationships will change. If you invest your effort in trying to improve organizational performance, you’ll eventually reap a dividend. The whole idea is to surround the information you trade with genuineness and sincerity for the welfare of the organization and those who keep it running. Certainly the content of your message will be appreciated, but of greater importance will be the approach taken.

Whatever techniques are used, measure the results. If one approach isn’t giving enough return-on-investment try another approach. The best places to work are ultimately decided from deep within the organization culture.



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