Bill Templeman

Leadership Basics for Frontline Managers

Tips for Raising Your Level of Effectiveness and Communication

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Preface

THE CHAPTERS

When I started writing the column in which these chapters first appeared as articles, I asked my editor to select a topic from a list of ideas I would submit prior to each deadline. As we became more used to working together, she eventually turned over the job of topic selection to me. All of which is to say that most of these topics have grown out of my own business experience as an independent consultant. There is much more that could be said about every one of these topics, but I decided it was better to focus on the essential learning points, and to make them as practical as possible. Each chapter ends with a list of bullet points or actions the reader might take to address a given situation. Consider this collection of articles to be a toolkit; reach in and take what you need and when you need it.

Note: I have taken appropriate liberties in fictionalizing scenarios to support the learning points and protect client confidentiality. A few of the chapters are responses to books or articles I have come across in my work. I have listed sources wherever appropriate.

Acknowledgments

While many colleagues and clients deserve to be acknowledged here for the ideas and shared experiences that led to this book, I need to offer my thanks, in particular, to a few people without whom the creation of this book would not have been possible.

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Introduction

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Most of the management skills chapters (25 in all) selected for inclusion in this book began life in 2006 as columns in the *Durham Trade & Commerce Magazine* and, since January 2011, in the *Durham Business Times*. I have grouped these chapters under three general headings: Personal Effectiveness, Leadership, and Communication. This introduction explores the origins of the chapters, what they are trying to achieve, and the context in which they were written.

In writing these chapters, I have tried to speak directly to that most underserved segment of the contemporary workforce: the frontline manager. These are the people who, as often as not, are promoted from operational jobs into positions that require them to manage not only work processes, but the people who do the work. They sometimes arrive in their new positions without sufficient formal managerial training in those most ill-defined of managerial competencies, "people skills." As a program designer and facilitator, my rewards are based on the levels of engagement participants display while in seminars. When I see enthusiastic involvement during a seminar and later receive appreciative feedback, I know that I have tapped into their neglected desire for development.

Why is this desire for development being neglected by organizations? Spending restraint is the easy answer, but not the only one. In an era of strategic management and high executive control, investment in employee development, particularly when imposed from above without a detailed business case, without feedback from the intended audience, without a needs analysis or implementation strategy, and without strategic alignment to an organization's business plan, can indeed lead to negative returns: loss of time, loss of money, and, more importantly, incalculable losses in trust and credibility.

However, it doesn't have to turn out this way. Properly done, good employee development can improve careers and unleash the power of

organizations to achieve great things. I make no apologies for being messianic on this point: Good training can change lives.

How can organizations "get it right" in terms of how they train their frontline managers?

Too often, training in management skills, particularly on communication, either does not happen at all, or happens sporadically in a patchwork fashion that has no focus or tie-in to the rest of the organization. Training budgets, if they still exist, are viewed as being thoroughly dispensable when competing business priorities collide. In large organizations, the tendency is to continue training, but, in order to manage tight budgets, there is a trend toward doing all training individually and online, often without follow-up. Online training, applied appropriately, has immense potential for improving performance. However, a webinar, just like a classroom seminar, is only a delivery vehicle for learning activities. Regardless of the vehicle, **the learning needs to be aligned, reinforced, and modeled throughout the hosting organization** in order for a decent return on investment to be realized.

Most unfortunate of all is the slippage in assumed common knowledge that has happened over the past decade. What was common knowledge 10 years ago and unnecessary to repeat now requires detailed explanation. Not so long ago I had to launch into a detailed explanation of SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound) objectives. SMART objectives were as common as hammers and nails during the Quality Movement of the 1980s. Not anymore. **Organizations can no longer assume a common knowledge base.**

Digital technology is changing our learning styles. Lectures and texts are becoming increasingly irrelevant as useful instructional tools. Attention spans are shrinking. Tolerance for reading is shrinking**.** Part of getting training right means that **learning has to be parceled into very time-efficient packages in order to maximize uptake.**

The complexity of work is accelerating at an explosive rate. Employees need to know much more today in order to do the jobs expected of them. More than that, the culture of work is being stretched and compressed by opposing trends at the same time. We have less time for the human side of work. Spans of control have widened significantly over the past two decades**. The success of any training initiative depends on the acceptance of the reality that we must all work through multiple paradoxes every day.**