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Knowing your managers

By Paperitalo Staff

Whether you are at the bottom looking up or on top looking down, knowing what motivates middle management in your organization is extremely important. I am not talking about what should motivate them (a sense of solid fiduciary responsibility, striving for excellence, and so forth); I am talking about what really motivates them--are they ethical, honest, energetic?

There are two ways to find this out. One is through testing. There are some very good psychological testing systems available. For most of us, though, especially if we are down in the ranks, they may not be available to us. So, we are on our own.

The place to start is with yourself. Think about what you think about during the working day. Admit it, the amount of time you think about the tasks you are employed to do is not 100% of the time you are at work. If you can achieve 90% focus on the responsibilities of your position, I would think you are exceptional. I am asking you to do this exercise for one simple reason--to recognize that everyone else does exactly the same as you do, more or less. It is this non-work thinking that it is important to understand.

Fortunately, everyone leaves clues scattered nearly everywhere telling you what motivates them. Extreme: I once worked for a boss that ran an obviously illegal sports betting bookie operation out of his office--several thousand dollars a day back when I was making about \$4.00 per hour. That was sure a clue about what motivated him. Funny thing, although he and I had a totally different view about matters such as that, he was a good boss and I liked him very much. He died young (44) and his wife asked me to be a pallbearer at his funeral.

Most clues are not so obvious, however. First clue is to look at the trinkets in a person's work space. Everyone uses workplace trinkets to remind themselves of things of which they are fond. Lots of pictures of their kids--obviously family is important to them. Excessive sports memorabilia, or excessive anything else, you know where their mind really is.

What they say, however, is most important, especially what they say at the beginning of the day and what they say at the end of the day. At these two times, their minds are engaged in transition from outside to work and vice versa. During the rest of the day, excessive conversations about outside topics tells you they may not really be engaged.

So you have done all this and you have figured out your managers--so what? If you have done what I suggested diligently, you now have an edge. You know why the managers above or below you act the way they do. If you are the top leader, you can use this information to your advantage to motivate your subordinates even further along the lines necessary to move the business forward (if you are already at the top, you don't need this column, you figured these matters out long ago). If you are the subordinate, you can determine how to position your efforts on behalf of the company in a way to really strike a chord with your bosses.

Occasionally, you'll find a complete mismatch--a dishonest boss, a distracted boss or something worse. If this is the case, you'll have the information to decide whether you should attempt to outlast this manager (who will surely fail sooner or later) or whether you should cut your losses and leave now.

In any event, there is a tremendous amount of knowledge helpful to you, if you just learn to read the clues.

For safety this week, we want 100% of employees' attention on safety all the time. We seldom can achieve this, but we strive to get there with regular safety meetings and regular emphasis.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##