

HOW SHOULD WE MANAGE PEOPLE? IS THERE A CHOICE?

Managing people would seem to be just another discipline, just another area in which a body of knowledge, including theory, has been accumulated. This knowledge should form the basis for a set of discrete, definable procedures that if followed should yield the desired results. But “should” never occurs on any day of the week. If it did, there would be no need to write this book.

If you want to become a mechanical engineer and are willing to invest 4 years and \$100,000 or more, a host of universities and colleges will eagerly commit themselves to the task. I would say your chances of emerging with useful knowledge, assuming you graduate, are as high as 80%. After graduation, if I line up ten of you and direct you to analyze a machine with a problem, at least 6 or 7 will agree on the problem. If I make you all agree on the problem and ask for a fix, I may get six of you to agree on the same fix.

The above applies to many disciplines from accounting to nuclear physics. Don't try it in management of people. From what I have seen, the chance of getting even two of ten bosses to agree on the problem or on the fix is low. The reason for this inability to agree is that management styles vary considerably and we are encouraged to pick one that suits us, our personality, etc. But who would recommend taking the boss' personality or style over to a machine to use it to determine how to fix the machine instead of the manual and extensive knowledge?

“Hey stupid, don’t pull that stunt. Study the machine and then get yourself down there and try like hell to determine the problem using specific tests and determine the solutions based on a specific set of defined knowledge. It has nothing to do with you personally.” Somehow, though, when it comes to dealing with people, knowledge of the machine is not required. Instead, we are encouraged to superimpose our style, personality, likes and dislikes on the process. You dislike Phillips head screwdrivers, but like flat head screwdrivers. Those sentiments will not help you at all when you try to turn a Phillips head screw with a flat head screwdriver. The same is true for managing people.

The people management arena is strewn with hundreds of these excuses, such as “I don’t like to...” or “I can’t bear to...” We have all heard them. The evaded actions range from not being able to get up in front of a group to not wanting to counsel an employee, from not wanting to terminate an employee to not being able to provide succor in a time of need. The excuses to justify these evasions range from personality to “I don’t want to hurt someone” or “the moon was blue last night.” There are also many people who would like to blame the sociologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, religious, consultants and others for their own management errors. Excuses will always be available to anyone who is looking for them, especially to those who enjoy the permissiveness of “doing your own thing.” However, you must recognize that all of these excuses are invalid and their use signals that the user (boss) is not 5Star.

As with machines, excuses will always limit your success with people, if not cause outright failure. Listen to yourself using them (we all do) and get as far away as possible.

You must not decide what a person should be given based on what you have to give, only on what that person needs. Throw away your excuse box and your management style. Use your common sense and the same logical, methodical approach required to solve technical issues. That approach will be developed further here.

THE NATURAL LAW

It is appropriate now to disclose that the science of managing people is the science of leadership, pure and simple, no more, no less. Whether or not the CEO or boss wants to admit it, the ship is its

captain. This is reality and the boss (CEO or lower) has no control over it. They can't stop it, modify it, wish or order it away. It is a natural law that operates inexorably and without regard for the human beings involved. The process that results waits for no one. It just happens day in and day out.

Therefore, no matter what the actions, words, facial expressions, body language, verbal or written orders or policies, habits, personality traits, inactions through silence, or other boss behaviors are, these behaviors are followed by most juniors simply because a great majority of them are followers. The subordinates become what the boss projects. If the boss works hard, they tend to work hard. If the boss has little knowledge of certain things, they have little knowledge of those things. If the boss encourages, they will be encouraged. If the boss cannot bring him/herself to do certain things, they will not bring themselves to do it either. Followers clearly discern the implied value standards and set out to use them in their everyday routine. This sequence is a natural law, one that makes the boss either the subordinates' biggest ally or their greatest enemy or something in between.

The boss by virtue of appointment becomes the leader whether great and fearless or tyrannical and unsupportive. By choosing their own actions, the boss decides how subordinates will act. The boss can, of course, decide not to decide: "*What they see is what they get,*" or "*I was the one promoted so I must be OK the way I am.*"

The first quote represents a "to hell with the subordinates" tack, while the second is the height of arrogance. I don't mean to seem judgmental about this, but my true desire is to make crystal clear: each boss chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what his or her subordinates will be led to be. That they will follow the boss' lead has been preordained!

So then, do we really have a choice on how we manage people? Do we get to choose a management style of our own? The "Natural Law" dictates that we have no choice. We can only choose how we make use of the law to lead towards specific value standards.

LEADERSHIP - WHAT OF IT?

If we walk into a racetrack and the horses are in the middle of the race, I am certain we will all be able to agree on which horse is in

the lead. The “leader” will always be the horse “in front” of the other horses. The other horses are “following” the leader. Thus, leading implies being in a position that followers will try to attain.

Two questions emerge:

1. In what does the boss (CEO or supervisor) lead?
2. What do subordinates look to follow at work?

Fortunately for us, these two questions are merely different sides of the same coin, called *Values*. From the point of view of the boss, it is their leadership. From the subordinates’ point of view, it is what they follow. It makes no difference which one we analyze.

Following or Leading

To start the discussion, recall that 90% or more of all subordinates are followers, people looking to produce their behavior through copying that of others. This copying process is applied to values as well as to actions. In the workplace, people want to find out as quickly as possible what is expected of them so they can meet those standards and thus keep down the hassle, avert possible censure and keep the paychecks coming to feed themselves and their families. Conforming to peer pressure is also a part of this process. None of these are surprising revelations.

Remaining with the subordinates, how do they find out what’s expected of them, what the standards are for the different values? The process is the same one used during childhood, the one that absorbs everything around them. After soaking up everything that is available, the brain’s computer is used to sort out the “do as I say, not as I do” events, consequences presented by management or peers, and other nuances.

Through this process, new employees can very quickly get to act like all the other employees. They check what is happening to others and what is happening on-the-job in terms of normal values: attitude, cleanliness, industriousness, honesty, integrity, admission of error, knowledge, perseverance, fairness and all of the other ones. Their brain automatically performs computations and suddenly they know what the standards are for each. They have, in effect, translated actual conditions into value standards. So equipped,

they begin to use these standards to perform their work, standards for precisely the same values all of us have. This is the “natural law” and recall that the followers do not use their own value standards to produce behavior in the workplace. Only 5Star people do that!

Employees, therefore, detect the workplace value standards and use them to decide how to carry out their work. If these standards are high, we fly with the eagles, beat the competition most of the time and love our workplace. If these standards are low or toward bad values, we walk with the turkeys, lose to the competition and generally dislike coming to work. Can the boss afford to leave this situation to the whims of chance? Can the boss take a chance on which good or bad values and their standards are utilized in the conduct of work?

The leader’s only recourse is to commit to frequently and clearly communicating only very high value standards through the normal management actions of supporting, directing and developing. Actions speak far louder than words and the real truth is that no one listens to words!! As children, we didn’t understand the language of words and could only learn through the language of action, through what people do and their tone of voice and body language. This develops into a habit and is carried into adult life. Communicating values is thus an action-oriented process in which each boss must be proficient.

The boss’ actions range from one-on-one discussions to group meetings, from providing tools to training and benefits, from discipline to promotions and rewards, and from action or inaction when it’s their day in the barrel to termination for cause. Both actions and inactions transmit value standards, the latter often being the loudest. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being best, these actions and inactions must repeatedly reflect 8-10 standards for all good values if we expect to have real excellence in the workplace.

Carefully note the wide range of actions from which followers extract value standards to use in performing their work. For high-level bosses, what they personally say and do may constitute a very small part of a subordinate’s sources. The leadership value messages received by a person consist not only of the personal actions of their immediate boss, but also of what other people do to this person. “Others” includes staff, other bosses, peers and the rumor mill. Over the past week, a person may have received 200 messages on

fairness, 100 on quality, 50 on industriousness and only 2 on humility, with very few received directly from their immediate boss. Using past data combined with the latest 200 messages, this individual computes a new standard for fairness and does the same for each of the other value messages received. If these standards are low or reflect bad values, the bosses are in real trouble.

LIMITED CHOICES

So the boss is the leader and leads in value standards whether they want to or not. Once they move into the position of boss, they are the leader who will be followed and that is the law. The boss' choices are extremely limited. They can choose the direction in which to lead and they can choose the standard for that direction. In other words, the boss can choose to lead towards a good or bad value, for example whether toward humility or arrogance, and then the standard for that good or bad value on a scale from 1 to 10. Making the wrong choice or not choosing at all is to choose mediocrity or even anarchy with all of its attendant problems.

Leadership is simple and anyone can become an exceptional leader. Unfortunately, leadership has been revered and placed on a high pedestal, out of reach for most of us common folk. If it was ever knowable, it has become less so over the years. There is some belief that it belongs to a previous heroic age and is incompatible with participative management. Some people also question whether concepts such as democracy and equality are compatible with leadership. Although I did for years share these concerns, they all disappeared as I developed and practiced the *whats*, *whys* and *hows* of this book. I am certain leadership will become just as clear for you once you've put the knowledge of this book into practice.

CHANGING WORKPLACE PERFORMANCE

Unfortunately, bosses tend to believe their job is mainly one of giving orders. This consists of choosing the goals and the visions, directing actions by their employees to get there and then checking for the results. Bad results simply call for some form of re-direction.

But from the boss' "leadership" their employees have already computed a set of value standards that they are using every day in the execution of their tasks. Let's call these the "how-tos" of doing