The Importance of Working Together With Your Team

~ By Jonathan Farrington

The principle of working together with your team should underpin how you operate. Managing people doesn't just mean acting as overseer, to see that they get their work done satisfactorily. It means involving people throughout the team in a creative role, to ensure that together you are all able to succeed.

Involving people on broad issues is motivational. Never underestimate people. Their views can enhance everything: methods, standards, processes and overall effectiveness.

Remember, managers are not paid to have all the ideas that are necessary to keep their section working well in a changing world, but they are paid to make sure that there are enough ideas to make things work and go on working.

Use your people and make it clear to them that you want and value their contributions.

Underpinning Success

Some matters are of particular importance to the way a manager and staff work together. This is not the place to review the whole management process, but the following four areas are key and must be addressed correctly early on if results are to follow. They are:

- Setting Goals
- Project Management
- Ongoing Development
- Performance Appraisals

A quick look at each of these in turn...

Setting Goals

"If you don't know where you are going any road will do"

For all its familiarity and common sense this maxim is worth reiterating. No one and no organisation works well without clear objectives. The responsibility for setting many of them may well be yours.

Objectives will only be clear if they are SMART:

- **Specific** so that they are clearly understood and no misunderstanding is possible
- **Measurable** so that everyone knows whether they have hit them, or not
• **Achievable** because if they are simply pie in the sky they will be ignored and you, and any future process of objective setting, will lose credibility
• **Realistic** in the sense that they must logically fit within the broad picture and be a desirable way of proceeding
• **Timed** without clear timing they will become meaningless

The objectives you set must condition and direct what your people do. Make sure everyone has clear goals and they are committed to achieving them.

**Project Management**

Many of the tasks to be done involve the complex process of people working together in a co-ordinate way over time. When this is headed up by you or involves you, make sure that the project is:

- Carefully and systematically planned and organised
- Effectively executed
- Precisely monitored
- Fine-tuned so that contingencies and changes are accommodated

Brought in on time, on spec and if appropriate, on budget

Your management of others will be jeopardised if the way you organise the work of the section in any way falters.

**Ongoing Development**

Nothing is more important to people than their success. Time and again you hear people say something like, “Above all, I want to work with a manager from whom I can learn.” The development of your people is not something to ignore or leave to training departments. The responsibility is yours. Make sure people have the right knowledge, skills and attitudes to do the jobs you want and to do them well. Development is not only about correcting weaknesses, it is about upgrading and taking people forward, not least to keep up with change.

Tell your people that you:

- Recognise that their development is important
- Will help them gain experience and extend skills, and
- Create a visible system so to do

As the old saying goes you can either, "have five years' experience or one year's experience multiplied by five." People want the former. Show them you are the means to achieve it.

**Use the Development Cycle**

- Analyse the job (what is needed to do it)
- Analyse the person (their competencies)
- Look ahead, anticipate what new skills, etc. the job might necessitate in the future
- Define the gap - what must be done to create a good fit between the person and the job
- Specify development activity, methods, budget and priorities
- Implement action and monitor results

This is a rolling cycle. Keep clear records, make sure everyone is reviewed in this way and create a culture in which people value development and what it brings. Part of your job is helping people to learn.

Development is sufficiently important to people (as well as being important in its own right) for you to address the process and give out the right messages about it. You may, sensibly, not want to send everyone off on a course so consider other actions, asking:

- Should development be on the agenda for meetings?
- Can anything be done on-the-job? (In any case, a key part of the manager's personal responsibility for development)
- Can any ongoing actions be instigated now? (A simple monthly lunchtime session, perhaps)

The culture of an organisation in terms of its attitude to training and development is important to people. Their view of it is, in part, dependent on you. Send the right signals.

**Performance Appraisals**

In many organisations appraisals are poorly conducted and rated unhelpful by those who are appraised. Appraisals should:

- Be constructive, helpful and motivational
- Focus on the future
- Be a genuine opportunity for both parties to ensure that the period ahead (year, quarter, etc.) goes well, perhaps better than the last
- Link to action plans for the future

Study your organisation's appraisal system and learn how to conduct an effective appraisal meeting. This is good use of management time. Apart from helping you achieve results in a practical sense; it will also position you as a competent manager and differentiate you from others.

**Management Processes**

Whatever processes you set up, will be seen as a sign of your style. If they meet with approval, trust is built. If not, they distance you from your staff. You must ensure system and processes are:

- Fair
- Understandable
- Effective
- Relevant
- Time (& cost) effective

And are not:

- Bureaucratic
- Out of touch with realities
• Over complex
• Restrictive/contradictory
• Incompatible with other systems/common sense

Everything you set up (or maintain if someone else instigated it) must aid the effectiveness and efficiency of the section. Those who do the work will quickly see inappropriate systems as you making their jobs more difficult; not a way you want to be seen. As the advertising slogan of the Abbey National banks said, “Life’s complicated enough.”

And Finally - The Four Vital Components

The trend during the last few years has been toward technology-based Customer Relationship Management Systems (CRMs). Research has shown that the benefits a company can realise from any such innovation are dramatically increased when four vital components are in place together:

1. Technology (CRMs for example)
2. A clearly defined sales process
3. Training and personnel development
4. Performance related compensation

Often companies will invest thousands of pounds in CRM technology, sales training and performance related compensation packages for their salespeople; yet forget about defining the sales process. As a consequence the investment made in other areas cannot be maximised unless there is such a process in place to underpin those three factors.

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