

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

March 2010

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource--Employees

Q. One of my employees wants to start telecommuting. We don't have a company policy on this. What are some things I need to think about before agreeing?

A. During a recessionary time many organizations' primary goals are to reduce costs, boost productivity, or reallocate resources to get more work done, perhaps with the same or fewer workers. The question should be, will telecommuting help or hinder these goals? There are some trouble spots to consider:

- Reduced productivity- Telecommuters and other flex workers may submit incomplete or late work, perhaps brought about by isolation, lack of supervision or susceptibility to home distractions.
- Unanticipated expenses- Be sure to factor in the possible need to underwrite duplicative home equipment, the extra costs of communicating with off-site employees, the price of expanded insurance coverage and other similar costs.
- Diminished management control- Difficulties may arise in exchanging information or promoting work-team cooperation, scheduled meetings (including impromptu meetings) around the telecommuter's schedules, or training employees who usually work at home. This is a common logistical problem when not everyone is at the worksite at the same time.
- Benefits- Unanticipated complications may arise from keeping track of holidays, sick days, and personal leave or other fringe benefits brought about

by changes in time reporting and workweek definition.

- Interpersonal problems- negative feelings (jealousy, resentment, perceived preferential treatment etc.) may develop on the part of employees pursuing traditional in-house work hours.
- Low visibility- flexible workers may feel left out of the communications loop or unintentionally blocked from promotional opportunities, which could result in career stagnation.

Q. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed and I have been told I could be much more effective if I delegated more. What sorts of pointers can you give me on how to do this?

A. First of all it would helpful to consider the fact that delegating tasks has many benefits to the employee you want to assign duties to. This can be a great way to train someone or to groom them for a promotion. Be thoughtful about what you delegate and the capacity and capability of the person that you delegate to. Delegating randomly can be a recipe for disaster if the employee is unprepared for the new responsibility. Outlining the desired results can help you gain a better idea of what you want to accomplish. Also, consider the following:

- Who on your team is best equipped to complete this task?
- Is the employee able to take on this responsibility in addition to his or her current workload?

- How will having someone else do this task benefit the organization or your department?

After designating someone else to do this task be certain to:

- Carefully explain the task to the employee.
- Give the employee a clear set of objectives.
- Avoid micromanaging.
- Set benchmarks for evaluating the project's progress.
- Follow-up—after all, you are responsible for making certain the project is completed successfully

Q. Several of my employees seem to be continuously engaged in passing along rumors. How can I deal with this issue constructively?

A. Office gossip is one of the most powerful and potentially destructive forces in the workplace. You can do several things to reduce the harmful effects of hearsay or gossip. Stephen Covey wrote in his book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," about integrity as a key factor in being successful and effective. One of the most important ways to manifest integrity is to be loyal to those who are not present. In doing so, we build the trust of those who are present. When you defend those who are absent, you retain the trust of those present.

Say for example, you observed two co-workers talking together about their supervisor in a way that they would not dare to do if the supervisor were present. Suppose you have a disagreement with one of them? You would probably wonder what they would be saying about you.

You have a good sense of their integrity based on what they've displayed previously. You are probably assuming that they would sweet-talk you to your face and bad-mouth you behind your back. You've already seen it.

Your best solution to this dilemma is to remind them of the need to be honest, open and kind. Recommend that they should provide feedback directly to the person.

Q. This recession has really created stress in my workplace. Several employees were laid off in my department and some of my employees are now doing the work of two people. How can I help them stay motivated?

A. Talk about this openly with your team. Perhaps brainstorm some ways to change priorities, determine what is basic and critical to the department and postpone any projects that are not essential. Encourage the team to be as flexible as possible. Make sure you listen to your team about challenges they are facing, and then ask them for some solutions. You don't have to have all the answers. This time can really show you which employees are resilient and able to tolerate ambiguity. In times like these your top performers will rise to the challenge. After all the reward for good work is oftentimes more work.

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