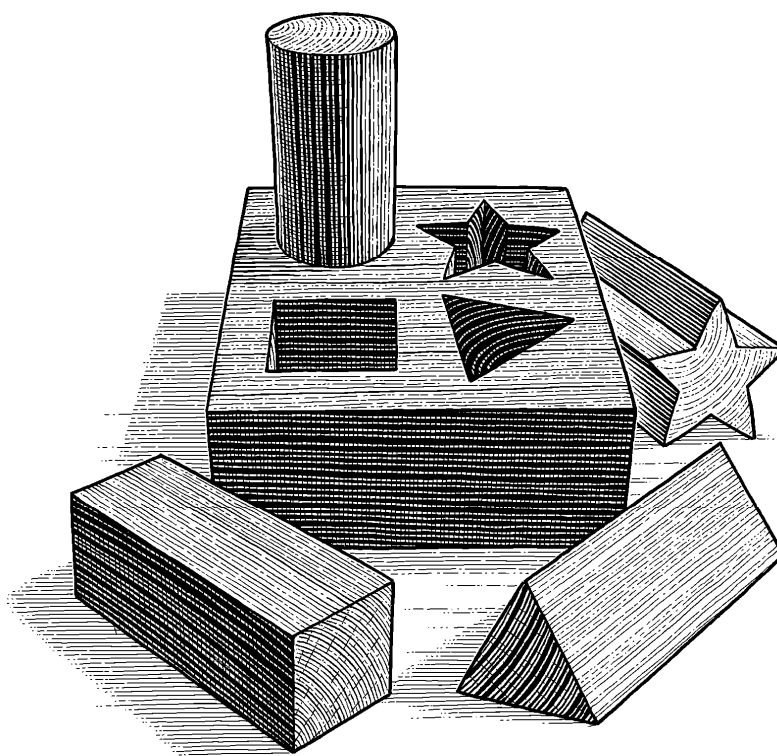


# Building A Championship Team

A Discussion of Key Issues  
For Leaders in the LBM Industry



For participants in the ABSDA  
Distance Learning Library education programs

Designed by:  
The PerCon Group  
Kansas City



# Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table of Contents .....                                   | 2  |
| Foreword.....   | 3  |
| Finding and Hiring the Right People .....                 | 4  |
| Sources of Applicants .....                               | 14 |
| Write Better Help Wanted Ads .....                        | 15 |
| Helpful Forms and Documents .....                         | 16 |
| Applicant Information Sheet.....                          | 17 |
| Employment Application .....                              | 18 |
| Sources of Applicants .....                               | 24 |
| Keeping the Right People .....                            | 25 |
| Common Sense Motivation.....                              | 35 |
| Getting the Team to Function As a Team.....               | 35 |
| The Concept of “Areas of Freedom” .....                   | 42 |
| Areas of Freedom.....                                     | 43 |
| How to Listen so People Talk.....                         | 44 |
| If You Could “See” The Dynamics of Active Listening ..... | 52 |
| Correct Them...Don't Cripple Them .....                   | 56 |
| Fair Ways to Discuss Problem Behaviors.....               | 65 |
| Help Sales People Get Off To A Strong Start.....          | 71 |
| Field Coaching Skills.....                                | 73 |
| Biographical Sketch--Bill Sharp.....                      | 84 |

# Foreword

The classic book ***FUTURE SHOCK*** spoke of "***the rate of change...of change.***" It pointed out that it took literally decades after the invention of the compressor for the commercial version of a home refrigerator to be sold. Today, ideas move from conception to wide spread use in a matter of days.

Products and systems to manage an building material dealership have always been evolving, but changes in the past 10 years have been major and have happened quickly. And, changes in the next 10 years will be equally dramatic.

The impact of "box stores" continues to be watched. Their impact on stores that cater mostly to consumer (D.I.Y.) clients is largely understood. Independents must focus on filling voids. The attempts of so called discount stores to sell to contractors has been less well defined. ***One thing seems clear, independent yards have defined how business is done with builders and remodelers over decades, and the attempts of box stores to change that model haven't been successful.***

Often one thing doesn't change. ***People get promoted to leadership positions and receive little or no specific training on the skills needed for their new roles.*** In an equipment dealership, a great parts counter person sometimes becomes a parts manager. He or she might know a lot about how to look up and price items...yet know little or nothing about how to do periodic performance evaluations.

These skills can be learned on-the-job...given enough time. But, that's an incredibly expensive way to learn because the new leader's staff is working with customers. If their staffs need to improve their skills to provide exceptional service, they need a coach...not a player/coach.

In the best managed businesses, an environment is created where employees want to come to work...not just get to work to get paid...they ***really want to come to the store.*** Their lives could be loaded with challenges, but if the store is a place where they feel like they're making a significant contribution and are being appreciated, they ***want to come to work.***

Building a strong team is what this program is about. There are many technical aspects of your job that could be equally important, but for a few hours we will focus attention on one issue...what do great leaders do to motivate their staffs to become top performers.



# Finding and Hiring the Right People

Without a doubt, **one of the least enjoyed tasks of management is interviewing and selecting new people.** Whether it is a simple position you're trying to fill or a key management slot, most managers simply do not enjoy the task, the hard work involved with hiring someone.

Why is this? One reason is that **you're risking a great deal in the hiring process.** The person you hire may not work out. During the time they're with you they may cause problems for others and eventually you may have to fire them. Of course, there is always the uncertainty of whether you can afford to meet the salary needs of the person with whom you're visiting.

There are the usual complications of being sure to ask the right questions and gain enough information to get what you want. Certainly, there is the danger of making a mistake in your interviewing practices and being called on the carpet by the Federal Government. Mostly though, **the reason managers don't like the job is that they're dealing with such a large number of unknowns in the product they're about to buy.** When you're buying a hard piece of equipment you can tell right away whether or not it has the things you want. When buying a person, you never really know until after it might be too late.

In this article we'll talk about the process of interviewing people to get the kind of talent you really want.

Let's begin by talking about some of the various sources available to you to obtain applicants.

## Talk with your employees

Certainly, **the best source of new employees is your own employees.** Any time you're looking for a line position applicant, it's always best to ask your own employees if they know of someone who is looking for a job. There are reasons why this is a good idea.

First, **your employees know what is expected of employees at your company** because they work there. Therefore, they're in a better position to sort out

those people they know who may not have work habits compatible with what you look for.

Even more important, though, your **employees are likely to recommend someone that they think would do a good job.** They would find them-selves in the shared responsibility of a bad decision.

Finally, **they probably have more contact with people like themselves than you might.** If you're looking for someone good in your service department, it's likely that one of your service people will be in touch with more service people than you.

## Business associates and vendors

Another good source of applicants is people like yourself. **Business associates and vendors may be aware of a number of people who could do a very good job for you.** Sometimes business associates (perhaps fellow members of a local service club) may have an employee they can longer keep because of economic conditions. As a result, they would be pleased to help that employee find a new position with a good company.

Just as the case with your own employees, business associates are less likely to pass off poor workers to you because they know the problem those people might create would create ill feelings with you.

**Business associates can include your dealer association.** Many times the association office is aware of good people who need a job. They can easily be a good source for helping locate the names of a half dozen or more good middle management people who for one reason or another need to find a good job.

**Business associates also include fellow dealers.** You talk to these other dealers about business matters on a regular basis...why not talk to them about your business needs in regard to finding people?

**Business associates can also include sales people who regularly call on your dealership.** If they have been dealing with you for a number of years, they have a good idea of what kinds of people work at your store and because they're traveling around visiting with so many people, they may have some leads.

Again, because they have a vested interest in not misleading you, **they probably would not recommend a person in whom they don't have a great deal of confidence.** Of the sources we've mentioned, this one is the only one that has some potential danger if not handled correctly. A sales representative could tell you of an excellent middle manager at another dealership, however, you must be careful about raiding another dealer's operation.

## State employment service

**The State Employment Agency can often be helpful.** Obviously they have a higher percentage of "difficult to place" applicants and without some guidance may send you several people you would rather not see. That's why you must be very careful in working with state employment agencies.

**It's best to go down and meet with one individual who might become your liaison so you don't need to talk to several placement counselors. Carefully explain exactly what you're looking for,** and tell your person that you don't want any applicants who do not meet your minimum specifications.

**Be sure to reject applications that do not meet your specifications and advise the State Employment Agency immediately that they are not sending the kind of applicants you're looking for.** They have a very high need to find employers they can work with on a regular basis and will work very hard, generally, to do a good job for you.

**Using the State Employment Agency also has a hidden benefit.** It's difficult for another state agency to later challenge you on failing to meet certain employment guidelines when your applicant base includes State Employment Agency.

State Employment services also are the first to know of major business shutdowns. If you are working with them closely, they might be able to steer some top quality people to you who have lost jobs through no fault of their own.

## Newspapers

Newspaper advertising is still a good way to get a lot of applicants quickly. Unlike the State Employment Agency, however, that can do some pre-screening for

you; newspaper ads will bring all kinds of people in your door. We will talk a little bit later about why **you must have a pre-screening process in your employment interview sequence** so you can quickly screen out those who obviously do not meet your standards.

**Without a doubt, newspapers will give you a quick look at what's available in the market place faster than virtually any other source.** Some employers choose to use blind ads to solicit information about applicants. **Often the very best applicants do not reply to blind ads.** They never know for sure who is running the ad. It may be their own employer and responding to it could create some real problems.

**You generally have better luck identifying your company in the advertising.** Be very specific about what you want. Avoid difficult to interpret words such as *"self starter"*, *"hard worker"*, *"dependable"*, *"trustworthy"*, etc. Each applicant will have his own interpretation of what those words mean. It's best in your newspaper advertising to stick to cold, hard specifics such as years of experience, prior training, owns a car they can use for travel, etc.

Many people who may think of themselves as a "self-starter" will quickly see that they may not have the minimum qualifications when they are laid out specifically. There's a world of difference between "able to supervise others" and "three to five years prior experience in supervising ten to fifteen people".

## Radio ads

When looking for younger employees, radio has become a very good source. **Young people don't read newspapers** (and seldom watch the evening news on TV). However, they listen to radio. Using radio advertising effectively involves the same guidelines you would use to advertise products for your store: **right station, right time of the day, repetition, well written copy.** If you don't regularly advertise on radio, get some information before spending money.

## Head hunters--professional agencies

Employment agencies that work on a fee basis are also a good source of potential applications. You will pay a fee for their services...often 25% or more of the first year's salary of the new employee. Make sure that you get some guarantee of the success of the placement.

Most agencies have a guarantee but sometimes don't mention it unless asked.

Even more important than working with the State Employment Agency, **to be highly specific about what you want.** With a professional placement agency you can and must demand a higher level of matching on applicants sent to you. Remember, their earnings come from proper placements. Make sure you get what you pay for.

There are of course pitfalls. These people are generally more articulate and sometimes can do an excellent job of selling you on an applicant who later may turn out to be slightly less than what you really wanted. Unlike any other source, they have a high vested interest in placing quickly. You may be pushed for a decision faster than you would really like.

**Employment agencies have the distinct advantage of being able to go on raiding parties for you.** You may not be able to contact a really talented employee in another company through any other source. They can go in, make the contact and arrange for the interview that you really want.

Be careful when working with employment agencies to let them know of applicants about whom you already have information. Employers have found themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to pay a fee for an applicant who previously responded to a newspaper ad.

If you're using more than one source to locate an applicant in addition to an employment agency, make sure at the time you talk to agency people that you give them the names of applicants you already have information on. This avoids a situation where they claim they were the first to introduce you to an applicant.

## Temporary services

**A very interesting and often very useful source of new applicants is temporary help services.** Using temporary services is a nice way for employers to find someone when they really don't know what they're looking for. A dealer told me once of a problem he had in trying to find a good secretary. He had hired and later discharged a couple of secretaries who simply didn't do quality of work he wanted, but he was unable to be highly specific about exactly what he wanted.

**What he decided to do was use temporary employees and rotate through several until he saw what he wanted.** He called a temporary agency and explained what he was doing. Most temporary agencies will work with employers who wish to hire their employees on a permanent basis. Often there is a small fee involved because they brought the applicant to you but often it is not anywhere near as much as a professional placement agency.

**Of course, using temporary services really kills two birds with one stone.** You get test drive plus the work gets done while you are continuing the search process. This reduces the pressure to make a quick decision.

## Vocational and technical schools

Another source we highly recommend is vocational and technical schools in your area. Young people who are planning to move straight from high school to the work place or perhaps want to take a job long before they might be able to if they go to a four year college can be found in these kinds of schools. The teacher has a high interest in finding employers with whom he can work so you're likely to get a great deal of positive response from any indication that you'd like to look at students from that school.

A dealer I know consistently uses students who are attending vocational or technical schools as temporary or part time employees. This gives him the advantage of a low cost person as well as an opportunity to begin early training. **The dealer I'm referring to often has the students in his store for two or three years while they're in school during which time he has an opportunity to train them and teach them about the business.**

At the same time, he has an opportunity to visit the vocational teacher and talk about the things he wants improved or changed in what students are taught so they can be more useful to him. As a consequence, when students are ready to take a job, the dealer has ready, trained and even experienced employees before they start to work on a full time basis.

## State Rehabilitation Office

Finally, don't overlook the **State Rehabilitation Program.** Workers who have been injured on the job

and may not be able to return to strenuous work receive excellent training. In some cases, their initial salaries are subsidized by the state or insurance companies to assure they get a fair chance at a new career.

This list is not intended to be one you choose to pick the single best source of applicants. **The best recruiters are ones who use several sources simultaneously.** You may be in a location where some of the ones listed here are not even available.

On the other hand, there are normally three or four readily available sources, and as a consequence, **it's to your advantage to use as many applicant sources as possible.** This helps avoid making a quick decision from a limited selection.

Often employers don't have the luxury of having six months or a year to look for a new person. When someone on your staff is released or resigns, you ordinarily must move rather quickly to fill that hole.

### **Job descriptions help**

Obviously, it is worth whatever time it takes to define what you're looking for. **Even the smallest dealership should have some kind of job description for the various jobs in the store.** A job description never covers every single thing an employee does in a given year, but it does give you a benchmark on the kinds of things that must be discussed in the interview. It also gives you some idea of what things to describe to those who will be helping you look for an applicant (if you are using secondary sources).

**Sometimes job descriptions have to be written or updated based on prior experience needed by applicants.** For example, you may discover that certain kinds of prior experience simply are not compatible with your operation. Maybe they've been trained on how to sell certain categories of material to a client base different from yours, but you've found that training of another type is actually more helpful. Keep track of these things, make notes to yourself and add it to the job description before interviewing potential employees.

**When you're writing job descriptions, be sure to focus on the job and not the last individual who previously filled it.** You may discover for example,

when replacing a top flight secretary that your desire would be to hire someone with the same talent the person leaving had.

Unfortunately, if the departing secretary had been with you for fifteen or twenty years, it's likely she has taken on greater responsibility and knew how to do the job more effectively than anyone you will be able to hire simply because she had greater familiarity with you. Focus on what it is you will expect the new person to be able to do.

Sticking with the example of hiring a secretary, some managers don't have any realistic idea of how fast a person should be able to type. In newspaper ads and during interviews they may be saying the applicant must be able to type 70 words per minute.

In a typical small business, however, it's unlikely you would need anyone who types at that speed. Someone who types at that speed would most often be doing high production typing. Perhaps your office only has an occasional letter or price sheet to get out. Therefore, perhaps a lower typing speed will suffice.

The more likely needed skills when hiring someone for office work is the ability to effectively use Microsoft Office programs. WORD and EXCEL are especially important.

**Always describe the tasks of the job in "minimum acceptable" terms.** Know what you must have as a minimum...anything over that becomes a bonus. If you must have someone who can drive a truck, for example, and find someone who can drive a delivery truck and operate a fork lift, you get a bonus.

Describing all of the tasks of the job in minimum also makes it easier for you to do early disqualifying in the interviewing.

### **Use a "clean" application form**

Once you have a clear picture of what you're looking for in the applicant, **take a long hard look at the application form you're using.** In workshops like this that we run around the country, we discover many dealers using application forms that were printed before the most recent guidelines were issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.



**There are a number of things that cannot be asked in interviews and cannot be used as a basis for disqualification from your job.** When the EEOC discovers you've been asking the wrong kinds of questions, you can be cited for violations and potentially open your business to scrutiny by the government. **It simply makes sense to use only those forms which have been screened.** Many office products stores have standard forms which have already passed legal tests.

If you'd like to screen your application form, here are some guidelines. First, **it is illegal to ask questions about physical condition.** It is acceptable to say that the job will involve lifting boxes of fifty pounds or more and find out whether or not the applicant has the ability to do that. But, you cannot ask questions about physical condition as a general interviewing practice. This is considered discriminatory to females, older people and any handicapped person.

**It's illegal to ask questions about appearance particularly if those questions are race related.** There are certain kinds of clothing and jewelry items that are enjoyed by certain races that are not particularly acceptable to others. If people meet your qualifications and wish to wear a certain kind of head dress (for example) that will not in any way impede their ability to do their work, it's illegal to ask if they'd be willing not to wear something associated with race or religion at the work place.

**It's illegal to ask about conviction records.** It's certainly fair and appropriate to ask whether or not an applicant has a valid driver's license if he's expected to do driving, and supplementary questions can be asked during the interview about traffic violations which might directly relate to a driving position.

It is, however, illegal to generally ask if a person has "been convicted of a crime other than minor traffic violations." This tends to discriminate against black applicants.

As far as the state is concerned, persons who have been convicted and punished must be considered viable applicants. Exceptions include employees who must be bonded.

Drug tests mandated by the state for drivers are certainly appropriate and in most state drug tests that are given to all employees are acceptable.

**It's illegal to ask information about the type of military discharge a person received.** This is discriminatory to blacks. They have a higher ratio of dishonorable discharges than others. If, for some reason, you have questions about military service on your employment application, simply look for length of service less than two years.

**All questions pertaining to marital status, child care and willingness of spouse to support certain conditions of the job are either illegal or highly dangerous.** These questions tend to discriminate against females. As long as applicants understand the hours they are expected to work and the problems created by unacceptable tardiness or absence, enforcement agencies tend to say it's none of your business how people arrange for care of children, preparation of meals or other things that may be a part of their private life.

The penalties for making hiring decisions based on problems in these areas have become very large.

**Of course, it's illegal to ask questions about age.** You are allowed to find out whether the person is over the minimum employment age limit in your state or beyond the normal retirement age of your company, but beyond that enforcement agencies find it discriminatory to ask specific information about the age of applicants. In an effort to deter discriminatory hiring practices, enforcement agencies have found that employment applications that ask for the dates applicants attended school are sneaky ways of finding applicants' ages.

**Finally, as much as it might potentially create problems to employ someone with a severe credit problem, it's illegal to ask questions**

**related to credit.** These questions can be discriminatory toward blacks. Again, the attitude of enforcement agencies is that the employer must make a reasonable attempt to make sure the applicant will be comfortable with the salary being offered by not eliminating applicants who may be experiencing personal financial problems.

## Make sure tests get good information

It's risky to administer any kind of psychological testing in association with the application process. If you use psychological testing in conjunction with selecting applications, you must prove that those who do not meet the exact profile you're using as a hiring basis would have failed on the job.

Some testing services just don't offer that kind of specific data. Even when they have data on the industry in general, the government can challenge whether or not your dealership is like those in the validation study. They may demand you prove that you have hired a significant number of people who failed the test and also failed to perform well on the job.

## Just follow the rules--it will work

Although it may seem like there are a number of strings being attached to the interviewing process, it's really not all that difficult to work with them. **The intent of the law is good and employers who make a sincere attempt to work with the guidelines generally don't have difficulties.**

Sometimes in very remote locations, employers choose to ignore employment agencies guidelines and either seek in writing or verbally those kinds of information that would be considered illegal.

You may have done this, and you may have been able to get away with it for years and years. Unfortunately, **if a suit is filed against you, the Federal Government and State Agencies can move in and start going through all kinds of records. It is simply not worth the risk.**

**In general, people get into more trouble with the paper on file than the forms they don't have.**

## Save time--use a screening sheet

Before handing everyone who walks in your door one of your application forms, it's best to conduct a miniature screening. **Create a simple form to use for this process so the same questions are asked of all applicants.** If an investigative agency feels you're using a set of questions for one class of applicants and different ones for others, they will investigate

thoroughly. The screening form should be no more than one page, preferably one side.

**Things you can and should ask on a screening sheet are simple things like the person's name, phone number, address, education/training, specifically what kind of job they're seeking and the expected salary or rate per hour.**

You could ask about work experience, present or last date of employment, what kind of work they did on their last job, and other questions which might be applicable to certain kinds of jobs (such as driving positions). But, you may want to save this kind of information gathering for the employment application. **The idea of the screening sheet is to quickly eliminate obvious mismatches.**

They may be looking for a position entirely different from what you advertised, and came in hoping you might have other positions open. The screening sheet will save an unnecessary interview and eliminate another paper to file (your employment application).

By not taking an application, but instead doing a simple screening, you can avoid the problem of being challenged by applicants saying they applied for a job, you turned them down and they feel it was discriminatory. When they tell you they are seeking a different kind of job than you had available, you can terminate the interview.

By gathering the information we've described above, you will have the fundamentals to decide whether to go ahead with an employment application...or...tell them you don't have the job they are looking for or the salary they expect.

Be sure to save the screening forms in your records. **They can become a handy source for call backs** when you have another position open and want to find someone you would like to bring back for an interview.

## Applications must be completed on site

If you chose to go ahead with an interview, hand the person an application form. **Always have applicants complete the form at your store.** The application form is about the best literacy test you have. If they leave with the form and return it, you have no idea who actually completed it.

## Always study it before interviewing

Once completed, take five to ten minutes privately to study the form before proceeding with the interview. You won't do well trying to simultaneously interview and read for "red flags" on the application form. It's best to have the applicant wait rather than to plow ahead and fail to ask questions that should be covered.

When you have the employment application, look for things that seem inconsistent. **Look for gaps in employment.** It is fair and reasonable for you to know what the person has been doing for the past several years. When you see blanks in employment history, circle them so you can ask about it later.

**Look for erratic patterns in salary.** Look for those situations where a person had a high salary and dropped to a low salary. Look for situations where someone is making a high salary or appears to be earning a great deal more than you have to offer but is willing to take a much lower salary. This could be someone who is actually looking for a temporary job.

**Look carefully at all the reasons why they left former employers.** All statements like "conflict of goals between supervisor and myself...became disinterested in the job...saw no opportunity for advancement...did not like working environment" may indicate problems that could reoccur in your business. Circle these kinds of statements so you can ask about them during the interview.

## Ask questions, don't sell

During the interview, watch out for your tendency to be a salesman. Good interviewers always think of themselves as buyers. The poor interviewer will spend too much time telling about the company and specifics about what the job environment would be like. Then they cap it off with one simple question like, "Does that sound like something you'd like?" The applicant who is anxious to have the job will certainly say yes, but you may end up with someone who doesn't really want what you're offering.

It's good to spend a couple of minutes establishing rapport and making comments about the weather or conditions in the town...as you might do with one of

your customers. Applicants often like to know something about you as a person. How did you start in this business? How long have you been doing this? What do you like best about your work?

After that, briefly describe something about the company and a little bit about the nature of the job. For example, if you're looking for a person for counter sales, it makes sense to say that the job includes helping customers in the store and on the phone, looking up product information in reference materials, writing yard tickets and adding prices.

Some applicants are very good at side tracking what should happen next. What should happen next is: you should be asking questions to find out if a person has what you're looking for. Instead, applicants sometimes begin asking about benefit programs, salary, vacations, etc.

**Managers can end up giving too much information or overselling and not get around to the more important task...getting information about applicants.**

Your interview with applicants should be guided by a list of pre-written questions. Type questions you would like to ask into a simple computer document file.

Leave some blank space to make notes. Here are some sample questions that you may find helpful.

*What do you know about my company?*

*How did you become interested in our company?*

*In school, what person had the most impact on you and why?*

*Tell me about activities in which you participated in school.*

*How would you describe yourself during this time in your life?*

## Use a cheat sheet--don't "wing it"

These questions help you get some idea of the formative years of this person. They make the

questions on the employment application about education come to life.

Here are some additional questions more related to job experience.

Tell me about the first job you ever had.

*Tell me about your two most recent jobs.*

*How did you obtain them?*

*What type of work did you actually do?*

*What parts of the job did you like most? Why?*

*What parts did you like least, why?*

*Why did you leave (or plan to leave) your past job(s)?*

*In which of your jobs were you most successful? Why?*

*Tell me about the personal progress you made during the time you worked for XYZ Company?*

*What are some of the difficulties you ran into on your job and how did you solve them?*

*In the past, on what things have your supervisors complimented you? Criticized you?*

*Is there anything in your background that you feel makes you specifically qualified for the job we have? Explain.*

*What things do you think it takes to be most successful in the kind of job you're applying for?*

*During certain periods, we must work extended hours. Tell me what problems this might create for you.*

*What kinds of things do you enjoy doing strictly for recreational or leisure interests?*

*If everything went well, what kind of work would you like to be doing for us or someone else five years from now?*

These questions nail down a lot of specific information about the ability of the applicant to do the job you have.

Here are some general questions you may want to throw in.

*Is there anything you'd like to add about your experience or background that you think would help me see the value of hiring you?*

*Is there anything else you'd like to tell me that you think may be important for me to know?*

These questions give applicants the opportunity to sell themselves...or perhaps inform you of things that may be a little tainted in their backgrounds.

After completing the interview series, it's fair for the applicant to get all of his or her questions answered. You can explain in some detail the salary and benefit plan, working hours and other such factors.

### **Think awhile before offering a job**

Applicants will generally want to know how soon you'll be making a decision on this job. If you're thoroughly excited with the applicant, frankly would like to hire him/her today and feel certain you will lose him/her if you don't make an offer, go ahead.

**But, try to allow yourself at least twenty-four hours to think through the decision you're about to make.** It's okay to say you will be making a decision within the next two days.

If the applicant is going to work under the supervision of someone else on your staff, it's best to divide the various probing questions between the two interviewers and double up on the interviewing process.

Perhaps one interviewer can ask about the formative years and the other interviewer can ask about job experience. Don't make the mistake of having both interviewers ask the same questions. Applicants get very good at becoming interviewees when two different people in the same organization are asking the same questions.

Sometimes the primary reason for taking twenty-four hours to think through whether or not to hire the applicant is simply so you have an opportunity to talk with a second person in your organization.

Before moving ahead with an offer of a job, it's always best to check references. Of course, **the references listed as personal references on the application are virtually worthless.** Very few people are going to list a personal reference who would not say nice things about them.

Your best source of information will be a past employer. Potential legal problems make it difficult for a former employer to give a great deal of information voluntarily. The risk is simply too high. However, they can and often will at least confirm information.

### **Use "hold harmless" forms to get information from former employers**

A simple form signed by the applicant holding former employers harmless for information provided to you will often ease tensions. At the conclusion of interviews, have applicants complete a simple form like the one on page 26 for each former employer.

If your applicant is a former employee of a large company that has a personnel department, try to get beyond the personnel department. They are not likely to know what kind of work the person did (either type or quality) and as a consequence the information you get will be skimpy at best.

You should have the name of the applicant's immediate supervisor on the employment application form. Try calling these people to "confirm" information the applicant has given you. You can say for example, the applicant "is applying for a job with our company, and I recently concluded an interview. I would simply like to confirm information he or she has given me." If the former supervisor is reluctant, offer to fax a copy of the "hold harmless" statement signed by the applicant.

This is why asking lots of questions of the applicant is so important. It's pretty tough to confirm something you don't have.

**As you conclude the interview process, be careful to not leave the impression you're about to hire the**

**person.** It's fine to say you have appreciated the interview and the person "is of interest." It's dangerous to say "you seem to be what we're looking for and we should have a decision very shortly." People who have been led to believe they're about to get the job sometimes become very aggressive in trying to find out why they didn't.

**When it's necessary to turn the applicant down, the general rule is "the less said the better."** Simply saying "another applicant with stronger qualifications is the one we chose" should do it. Make darn sure the person you did hire was, in fact, better qualified for very tangible reasons.

Make notes on application forms (of those who have applied for a job and were passed over) about the job for which they applied and what person got the job. Later, if you're asked about it or challenged on it, you'll have the hard records it takes to justify your decision.

### **Follow rules about clearing files**

Remember to hang onto your records. Your attorney can tell you how long records must be maintained in your state. The records will be your most important defense if you're challenged at some later time.

You do not have to produce records at the moment an investigator appears. Investigators may show up and ask to see all of your records. **If you have been challenged by some applicant, find out exactly who the applicant was and exactly the nature of the challenge. Schedule a time to meet with the investigator at a later date...and get hold of your attorney immediately.**

He will be able to advise you what records you must produce and what records can be held back.

A nice way to avoid the problem of stale applications in your file is to put a disclaimer statement at the top of your employment application sample later in this handout.

### **After an offer, the doors open wide**

Once the applicant has been hired, you are free to ask all kinds of questions that are illegal to ask during the interviewing process. You can gather information about health conditions, financial information that could affect

payment of wages and other such things which might have an impact on your business.

You can administer all kinds of psychological tests if you'd like to find out what kinds of people you have working for you. The guidelines are less strict on what you can find out about your employees after employment than before employment.

This article is not intended to make you fearful of the interviewing process. It is intended to make you aware that there are rules by which you must abide. Abiding by the rules is relatively simply if you will remember to avoid the legal pitfalls and use application documents which have been screened for acceptability.

If there are certain kinds of questions you'd like to ask but wonder whether or not they might pass the legal test, check with your attorney.

Mostly, **recognize that interviewing is simply a process of gathering information.** It's a great deal like probing for customer needs. The more questions you ask that cannot be answered yes or no the more likely you are to find out what you need to know.

Spend time with your front line supervisors who may be involved in the interviewing process to make sure they're aware of the guidelines and potential risks to the company of becoming involved in illegal practices.

Invest your time properly to get good people. They are available, and they want to work for you. The investments you make in people are substantially larger but potentially have a higher return than investment in any piece of equipment you might buy. Treat the process just that way. You're making a substantial investment for which you want a reasonable return.

# Sources of Applicants

| SOURCES                      | POSITIVES | NEGATIVES | WAYS TO IMPROVE |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| MY EMPLOYEES                 |           |           |                 |
| VO-TECH, DECA PROGRAMS       |           |           |                 |
| BUSINESS ASSOCIATES, VENDORS |           |           |                 |
| NEWSPAPERS                   |           |           |                 |
| RADIO                        |           |           |                 |
| STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE     |           |           |                 |
| STATE REHAB SERVICE          |           |           |                 |
| TEMPORARY SERVICES           |           |           |                 |
| HEAD HUNTERS                 |           |           |                 |

# Write Better Help Wanted Ads

## **Sales and Marketing**

Area dealer is looking for energetic, self-starter retail and counter sales person interested in earnings based upon performance. Opportunities to advance.

No relocation, very limited travel, good fringe package.

Send resume to: Box 1234  
Your City Paper

## **Counter Sales Person**

XYZ Company needs a retail and counter sales person.

Job involves greeting customers, estimating costs, finding product information on a computer based system, building displays, pricing products and placing orders.

Prior experience helpful but not required. Training available.

Apply in person  
Tuesday or Thursday  
1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
XYZ Company  
6789 Main St  
Your City

- 1. Avoid tough to define phrases like “energetic” and “self-starter.”**
- 2. Earnings based upon performance? Based upon whose evaluation?**
- 3. Applicants don’t know who is running a “blind box” ad. It might be their current employer. Blind ads mostly draw responses from losers.**

- 1. Say what you want and what the job involves. Applicants are less likely to get the wrong vision.**
- 2. Define interview times. If a winner walks in on Monday afternoon...interview him or her. Listing times compacts your time spent away from normal work.**



# Helpful Forms and Documents

## Telephone Interview Report

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you lived at your current address? \_\_\_\_\_

How long in the state? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you smoke? Yes No

Are you currently employed? Yes No How long? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have experience in \_\_\_\_\_ Yes No

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

Will transportation be a problem? Yes No

When could you be available? Immediately 1 week 2 weeks Other

What hours would you be available? Part time Full time

Weekends? Yes No

What initial salary would you expect? \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

|                               |              |              |            |                |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|----------------|
| <b>Voice:</b>                 | Pleasant     | Nondescript  | Nervous    | Rasping        |
| <b>Manner:</b>                | Smooth       | Vivacious    | Gregarious | Apathetic      |
| <b>Ease of Expression:</b>    | Fluent       | Organized    | Hesitant   | Slow but Clear |
| <b>Clarity of Expression:</b> | Good grammar | Poor grammar | Lapses     |                |
| <b>Appointment:</b>           | Time _____   | Day _____    |            |                |

If you decide not to offer an appointment, close with something like, " *This is obviously a screening interview. We will contact those people we feel are most qualified for our needs by 6:00PM this evening. Let me reconfirm your telephone number.*"

# Applicant Information Sheet

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT TYPE OF WORK DO YOU DESIRE?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

WHAT WORK EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

EQUIPMENT YOU HAVE BEEN TRAINED TO OPERATE?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

ARE YOU CURRENTLY EMPLOYED? \_\_\_\_\_

IF WE SHOULD OFFER YOU A JOB, HOW SOON COULD YOU BE READY TO START? \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT SALARY OR HOURLY RATE WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE? \_\_\_\_\_

**NAME**

SCREENING SHEET

# Employment Application

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

TYPE OF WORK YOU DESIRE \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

CURRENT EARNINGS (OR MOST RECENT JOB) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per \_\_\_\_

ARE YOU PRESENTLY EMPLOYED? \_\_\_\_\_

IF WE OFFERED A JOB, WHEN WOULD YOU BE AVAILABLE? \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT SKILLS DO YOU HAVE/WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN TAUGHT TO DO?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

EDUCATION (Please answer in the order in which you attended with most recent being last):

| Name of and type of school: (i.e., elementary, high school, college, etc.) | Did you graduate? |
|--|-------------------|
|  |                   |
|  |                   |
|  |                   |
|  |                   |

PRESENT OR MOST RECENT EMPLOYER: \_\_\_\_\_

HOW LONG EMPLOYED? \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

SUPERVISOR'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

MAY WE CONTACT THEM?

PRESENT EMPLOYER    YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

FORMER EMPLOYERS    YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

DATE

NAME

**EMPLOYMENT HISTORY** (Please begin with most recent employer):

| <b>DATES EMPLOYED</b><br>(from-to) | <b>EMPLOYER</b> | <b>BRIEF JOB DESCRIPTION</b> | <b>PAY</b> | <b>REASON FOR LEAVING</b> |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|------------|---------------------------|
|                                    |                 |                              |            |                           |
|                                    |                 |                              |            |                           |
|                                    |                 |                              |            |                           |
|                                    |                 |                              |            |                           |
|                                    |                 |                              |            |                           |

WHAT INFORMATION WOULD YOU LIKE TO ADD?

---



---



---

The information above is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge. I understand that if I am offered a job with your company, accept it, and later it is determined that my answers to any of the above questions are not truthful; I may be dismissed from employment.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of applicant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT VALID 91 DAYS AFTER THE DATE IT IS SIGNED

# Red Flag Factors

## Telephone Screen

- ◆ Residence in the city for less than three months
- ◆ Lives more than fifteen miles from the office
- ◆ Would leave current employer without notice
- ◆ Has held current job for less than four months
- ◆ Spouse employed in transitory work (highly subject to transfer)
- ◆ Salary expected is unrealistic for this job in this market
- ◆ Separated with divorce pending or divorced less than three months
- ◆ Has hesitation about working the normal hours
- ◆ No telephone where applicant can be reached
- ◆ Poor communication skills (poor grammar, lapses, apathetic, etc.)
- ◆ No previous work history

## Initial Interview

- ◆ Any of the above reasons that were not detected on the phone
- ◆ Appearance
- ◆ Lack of knowledge of the job being applying for
- ◆ Failing to have the necessary maturity, sincerity or consistency
- ◆ Difficulty in working into staff team (a gut hunch)
- ◆ “Pushy” or too forceful in the interview
- ◆ Late for the interview by ten minutes or more (an act of God excused)
- ◆ Has been drinking prior to the interview

## Employment Application

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Wants full <b>OR</b> part-time work.                | 7. Previous work history shows:                  |
| 2. Currently employed but immediately available        | a. Vague, missing information                    |
| 3. Scratch-outs  | b. Poor reasons for leaving previous employer(s) |
| 4. Has a degree in a specific field, but never used it | c. Scratch-outs in wage info                     |
| 5. Gaps in work history                                | d. Left jobs for more money, but made less       |
| 6. Doesn't want former employer contacted              | 8. Changed jobs to advance, but none listed      |

## Final Interview

- ◆ Any of the above not previously detected
- ◆ Unexplained lapses in employment history
- ◆ Consistent unfavorable reference checks
- ◆ Dramatic departure in reaction from the first interview
- ◆ More than three employers in the past five years

# Interview Guide Questions

Tell me about the very first "real job" that you had (one where you got paid).

Tell me about your two most recent jobs. How did you obtain them? What type of work did you actually do?

What parts of the job(s) did you like most? Why?

What parts did you like least? Why?

Why did you leave (or plan to leave) your past job(s)?

In which of your jobs were you most successful? Why?

Tell me about the personal progress you made during the time you worked for ABC Company?

What are some of the difficulties you ran into on your job(s) and how did you solve them?

In the past, on what things have your supervisors complimented you? Criticized you?

Is there anything in your background that you feel makes you especially qualified for the job we have? Explain.

What things do you think it takes to be successful in the kind of job you're applying for?

During certain periods, we must work extended hours. Will this be a problem for you?

What kinds of things do you enjoy doing strictly for recreation or leisure?

If everything went well, what kind of work would you like to be doing for us or someone else five years from now?

What else would you like to add about your experience or background that you think would help me see the value of hiring you?

What other things can you tell me that you think may be important for me to know?

***This is an acceptably accurate record of questions asked and answers given during an employment interview conducted on***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Applicant

# Reference Check Authorization

TO: (Applicant's former employers)

I hereby authorize and request you to provide complete information on my employment record with you to (Your Company).

In consideration of you honoring my request, I agree to release you from and hold you harmless for any and all claims I might have as a result of you providing such information.

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: (Applicant)\_\_\_\_\_

WITNESSED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Complete one for each former employer listed on employment application)*



# Sources of Applicants

| SOURCES                      | POSITIVES  | NEGATIVES  | WAYS TO IMPROVE  |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|
| MY EMPLOYEES                 | They know you, your expectations. Bad recommendations reflect on them. Will help, guide more.                        | Poor performers may bring more like themselves. What about relatives on the payroll?                       | Seek references only from top performers   |
| VO-TECH, DECA PROGRAMS       | You can build your future employees... they learn <b>you</b> . Their instructor has a high need for them to do well. | Can end up with a bunch who don't want to work. There are labor restrictions. It takes time to train them. | Get to know the teacher. Define what you want.   |
| BUSINESS ASSOCIATES, VENDORS | They see people looking for work that you may not see. Vendors know your operation, can sometimes spot a match.      | You might get their problem employees. Big potential problem if you hire their kids.                       | Define what you want. If it isn't working, cut off the pipeline early.                                       |
| NEWSPAPERS                   | You see lots of people.  | You see lots of people.  | Better ad. Say what you want. Avoid blind box ads. Use a screening sheet to avoid interviews you don't want. |
| RADIO                        | Young people don't read papers...more likely to reach them.  | Must learn about radio advertising to properly place the ad  | Ask young people what station they listen to--get numbers from radio sales people.                           |
| STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE     | Hedge against charges of illegal hiring practices. They often have advanced knowledge of big lay offs.               | Lots of their base has lower drive to get work.  | Establish relationship with one person; define needs carefully; cut wasted time                              |
| STATE REHAB SERVICE          | Those in program receive high quality training; subsidies often available.   | Disabilities can be too severe for your job; may take time for them to like new career.                    | Find out what they teach; make sure agency has good information about demands of your job.                   |
| TEMPORARY SERVICES           | Huge base; chance to "try before you buy." Very low fee if you hire.   | Many don't want or can't take full time employment.  | Tell office manager of temp service what you're doing...they can do some pre-screening.                      |
| HEAD HUNTERS                 | Can find exactly what you want   | Expensive and they may come back to raid you   | Get a guarantee, let them know of applicants you have already seen   |

# Keeping the Right People

Every leader would like to have a highly motivated staff. By highly motivated they often mean a group of people who appear to **enjoy their work**, seem to be able as well as willing to not only **get their work done** but **look for additional things to do**, and in general **create a pleasant environment for customers**.

**I have never found a business anywhere where that situation existed in all employees.** Chances are pretty good that even with all the ideas of this article that you will not be able to create that kind of situation in all of your employees.

On the other hand, chances are pretty good that you can substantially improve the attitude and productivity of your employees with some of the steps we will outline. **Perfection is not possible but excellence certainly is.**

## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Several years ago, Dr. **Abraham Maslow** developed a theory about what it is that motivates people. His theory has been spread through industry in virtually every course on motivation. According to Maslow, humans have a series of needs that must be satisfied as they will move to a higher level of motivation. He theorized, for example, that people are less interested in receiving a walnut plaque or incentive prize if they are not **earning enough money to pay their bills**.

That could mean that **the place to start in making sure that people are happy in their work and their lives is to make sure that their physical needs are cared for.** Of course, there is a great deal of truth in that thinking. People do quit their jobs and go elsewhere if they are being paid inadequately. That's why labor unions became so powerful. Employees, who basically enjoyed their work but were not being adequately paid, organized themselves into groups to exert pressure on employers to pay them more money.

Unfortunately, it is this kind of thinking which created the term "**Money is a motivator**". In industries experiencing difficulties right now because of high wages being paid and severe competition from others, both leaders and workers have lost sight of the fact that **money is a motivator only to a certain point.** Again, people must be paid an adequate salary, but very quickly money loses its ability to motivate further.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs continues to a **desire is security.** After obtaining enough money to take care of physical needs, people want to protect their future. They look for things that assurance of job security, pension plans and insurance programs to protect their future. It's true that a good salary could be lost if a major health problem develops.

Following the development of programs to secure their future, workers move up to such things as **wanting work environments where they can make friends and enjoy social contacts.** From there they have desires for **recognition, achievement** and ultimately something Maslow called "**self fulfillment**". At this, the highest level of motivation, the fundamental psychological needs of workers have been met, and they now want to do something just for the good of the world or society.

Unfortunately, many industries have tried to create motivational programs based strictly on the Maslow model. They have tried to create programs for entire groups of people. This includes complex salary programs, very elaborate benefit programs and extremely expensive incentive and recognition programs. The important thing to remember: **people are complex and live in multiple levels of motivation at one time.** People who are struggling with debt, still respond to recognition.

Most workers are concerned about several kinds of motivationally related things simultaneously. **Motivation then is a very personal and internal kind of thing.**

The most leaders can do is assess the general environment in which their people are working to make sure that some of the more important elements of a sound compensation and recognition programs are in place. Then, leaders can make sure that each staff member is being dealt with as an individual.

### **Achievement and Recognition**

Other psychologists and researchers have found that the things which most workers say they prize most or value most from their work are those things which provide them with recognition and achievement. Dr. **Frederick Herzberg** did a study in which he asked workers about various things which made up their overall environment including things like money, benefit programs, recognition systems, etc., and discovered that **the number one motivator according to workers was something they called achievement.**

Number two was recognition.

His work has been duplicated by many others and results have been virtually the same. **Most staff members say the thing they like best about their work is the sense of accomplishing something.** They become de-motivated when the work becomes mindless, boring and tedious.

Opinion Research, Inc. (in New Jersey) does studies on a regular basis in which they ask sales people what they like best about their work. One of their more recent studies, involving 100,000 sales people, indicated that salespeople say the thing they most enjoy about selling is the variety that comes with the job.

Although they never know for sure what is going to happen with the next customer, **they enjoy the fact that each situation is a little bit different and requires them to think.** They also are exhilarated when they can convince a customer to buy something.

The second thing they most liked about selling was the freedom that comes with the job. They don't have to do a repetitive task for several hours. They may stock shelves for a while, work with customers for a while but they enjoy the freedom which comes with making decisions about what they will do next. This is important for leaders to remember. Variety is more important than breaks.

In spite of frustrations salespeople expressed about customers not being willing to buy, they enjoy the challenge that comes with trying to convince customers to take action.

### **Changing mindsets takes time**

Dr. **Maxwell Maltz** wrote a book a few years ago telling of his discoveries in years of practice as a plastic surgeon. In his book, he theorized that not only do **leaders and co-workers sometimes feed negative ideas into the minds of workers--** workers themselves feed negative information into their subconscious minds that can cause them to be unable to perform tasks that they have the skills to perform.

Hundreds of others have also done work trying to unlock the magic door which will cause leaders to have the skills to "motivate" their staffs. But, motivation is a complex issue. It's complex and yet there are identifiable things leaders can do to motivate their staffs.

### **Do you punish good performance?**

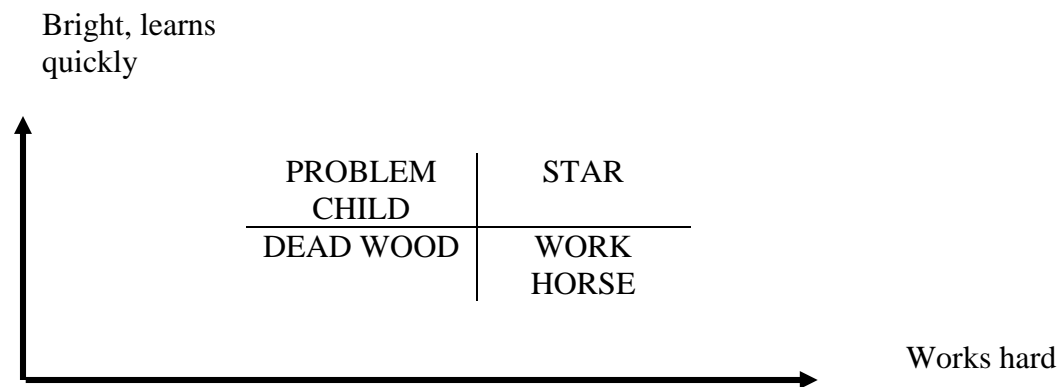
Let's start by looking at some of the most common things that occurs in work groups place and what leaders can do to make corrections.

Every leader has seen situations where, over a period of time, **very good workers quit doing the "extra" things that he or she once did.** It's often a source of amazement that new workers out perform veterans.

In sales, it is not uncommon to hire a new person and watch that person, within a relatively short period of time, out sell others have been around for years.

It's also frustrating when **some people quit doing the kinds of things which made them highly successful earlier in their careers.** It's even more frustrating a person like that leaves, goes to a competitor, and becomes revitalized. Why does this happen?

Sometimes it's because **top performers are being punished for the good things they do.** I always find it interesting to challenge managers with that thought. **Is it possible that you've created a situation in which performance is punishing?** Is it possible that a worker who is doing some extra things to make the merchandise look better or is working a little harder to get the area cleaned up before going home could be punished for doing those things?



As the diagram illustrates, when you have a worker with a great deal of potential who is also putting in a lot of effort you have what I call a **"Star"**. These are the kinds of people you wish everyone were like. **They work hard, and they see opportunities to do more and take action to do it.**

The sad thing is that stars often get punished for doing good work. **If they finish all of their regular work on time, often they are asked to help someone else** who is not putting in as much effort. As a consequence, over a period of time, **stars figure out that doing extra work simply means extra work.**

It happens in several ways. First, there is a great deal of pressure on that person from other workers. I remember an experience I had in college when I worked for the post office. I was substituting for one of the veteran carriers one day and returned with all the mail delivered...three hours ahead of schedule. The other carriers came to chat with me about how working at that speed would create problems for the entire team. They **encouraged** me to not do it again.

More commonly the problem is one created by leaders. The entire staff of most dealerships can be divided into four groups based on potential and effort. Following is a little diagram that illustrates these groups.

So, what do you do with a star? You polish the star. Reward your stars with assignments that are interesting and challenging to them. You make sure that they are being rewarded and compensated properly for the extra work they do

The second category that we appreciate is the one I call a **"work horse."** These people don't necessarily have great potential for taking on creative assignments, but **you never have to worry about their punctuality nor their willingness to complete assigned tasks. They are simply good, hard working people.** Don't attempt to load your work horses with creative assignments like re-merchandising a display area.

Keep the assignments straight forward but build in some stretch so that they actually have a challenge to complete the work. What do you do with a work horse? You feed it.

Make sure your work horses are being compensated properly and are given little things like a day off during hunting season or fishing season to take care of basic enjoyment needs.

The next category is one that frustrates us. I call them the **“problem child.”** **These workers have great potential...creative minds and ability to do more than they are now doing.** The problem child is one that doesn't do his work or creates problems for others in the group. Sadly, it's often the star who is asked to complete the work

**The problem child is smart. They know how to get other people to do the work for them.** They always seem to get out of difficult assignments by saying, *"I'm not sure I know exactly how to do this."* Then you or one of your other people step in to just show them how to do it while they sit back and say, "I fooled them again".

What do you do with the problem child? Make them take responsibility for their work. Don't bail them out, and don't reward them until they do the work that they're supposed complete.

The final category is one that I call **“dead wood.”** **These people have virtually no potential and are not really putting forth any effort.** Unfortunately, we often keep dead wood

around long after we have realized they are dragging down the entire staff.

Often we just hate to fire people for fear that we might destroy their families or lives. However, **keeping dead wood around is a clear message to the rest of the staff that productivity is not important.**

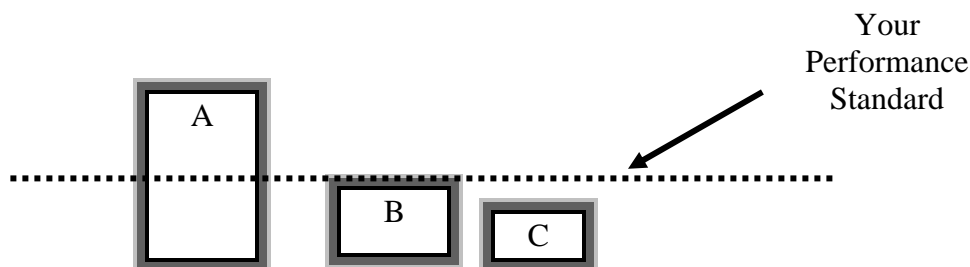
What do you do with dead wood? Burn it. Be as generous as you feel necessary, but dismiss them as quickly as possible.

When faced with a situation where good workers are being turned off for doing extra work, increase the reward for those who do the extra work. Getting the work done well and on time is important. Often, your top performers don't mind doing the extra work provided they are properly recognized and compensated for it.

### Do you reward slackers?

A very similar question to ask yourself about the motivation of your staff might be, **"is non-performance rewarding?"**

**Is it possible for those who do not perform to be rewarded nicely for it?** Not only is it possible, but it frequently happens. As indicated in our example above, of the four categories of workers, sometimes the problem child and dead wood are rewarded along with the stars and work horses by being allowed to keep their jobs. Often, however, the problem is even more serious.



The illustration above is an example of what often happens in compensation systems. There are three employees. One is obviously substantially exceeding performance expectations (might be a star), one is meeting the standard (might be a work horse), and finally one is substantially below performance standards (might be either a problem child or dead wood).

Although many leaders say their compensation programs are based on performance, what actually happens, in many cases, is that raises are given on a percentage basis...to everyone.

For example, suppose you have determined to increase payroll costs by four percent, and theoretically you will give larger raises to the people who exceed performance standards and little or nothing to those who do not meet performance standards.

Instead we often give a blanket salary increase. This is what ultimately causes the biggest problems with union contracts. In every group of employees there are some who work hard and are very productive. There are others who aren't. When it comes time for raises, however, everybody gets the same thing.

In the example above, let's suppose you gave a four percent raise to all three employees. In spite of all your instructions to keep salaries confidential (which incidentally is a violation of federal law), within ten minutes after the last person has received a raise, all will know what the others got.

Ask yourself how much motivation will be created by the money you just gave away. Will employee C be motivated to perform to higher levels because you gave him or her a raise? Not likely.

Employee B was probably delighted with the raise he had coffee with Employee C. Will Employee B will be motivated to continue work harder than C in the coming year? Not likely.

Finally, Employee A will probably learn what the others got and quit. As a result of giving a blanket raise, in this example, you de-motivated two thirds of your work force and lost your best employee. **It money a motivator?** It can be if it's properly applied.

Many American businesses are run like a three story building with two janitors. There is a janitor on the first and second floors, but none for the third. The janitor on the second floor is a real hustler and always has his floor done by midnight. So what do we do? We assign him the third floor. The janitor on the first floor seems to never get his floor finished. So, what do we do? Hire him a helper.

If the psychologists are correct in their theories that employees are more motivated by achievement and recognition than other factors, it makes sense to **assure that (monetary) recognition is given only to those who actually deserve it.**

### **Is there a better way to do it?**

If you are compensating your top performers and not rewarding your non-performers, the next question you can to ask yourself is: **are there are obstacles creating frustration for employees. It's sad but often that we don't listen carefully enough to the suggestions of our own people on how daily tasks can be done more efficiently.**

A few years ago Ford Motor Company closed a plant at San Jose, California. The national network television stations were there to interview workers as they exited the plant for the final time.

One of the most memorable interviews was with a worker who had worked there nearly thirty years. He had a son working at the plant. The plant was #1 the company's quality control system.

In his final interview, the worker said, "*In thirty years no one ever asked me whether or not the job could be done faster or more effectively.*"

*They simply told us how the job would be done and expected us to do it even when there were times that their plans were ridiculously complex."*

When Motorola Television operations were sold to Panasonic years ago, the Japanese took over the plant and made only one change. They did not change the workers, the production line or the parts used in the process. They only changed the manager of the plant.

Before that change, the rejection rate (by the plant's own internal quality control department) was thirteen percent. Within six months the rejection rate was 0.3%. The most significant change the new manager made? Every day he manager went out to the production area and asked workers (different ones each day) two questions:

***"What is the biggest obstacle to improving your efficiency in producing this product? If it were up to you, what you change to make it work better?"***

Much has been written over the years about the Japanese style of management. Although there are many things that cannot be copied from Japan, one thing that can is the degree to which leaders take sincere interest in the opinion of their employees.

In large plants, they have quality circles groups. The groups are challenged every week to determine what they can do to improve the part of product on which they work.

One of the things which characterizes very successful American businesses is the tendency of management to seek the opinion of employees about how the job can be done better.

This cannot be done through suggestion boxes. Management must get out and talk to the workers.

In the excellent book **In Search of Excellence**, the authors interviewed managers of the best run corporations in America. They found that most managers of these corporations subscribe to something they call **MBWA...Management by Wandering Around**.

Staff meetings (in which employees are regularly asked to evaluate their own work and tell what might be done to make it more efficient) not only produce greater productivity in the shop but also increase motivation. In a sense, workers take ownership of the work.

We suggest that you **have discussions with your people when a project or goal has not been completed**. When workers have an opportunity to analyze what went wrong and what can be corrected, the frustration does not drag them down.

Equally important is the opportunity to **evaluate those things which went right...when success is achieved**. Nothing is more frustrating than feeling that "things just happen to go right". If things **happen** to go right, how do you replicate it?

Your business is changing rapidly. What you did to make your team pull together and be productive as you built your business may not be the correct approach today. Even if it is, remember that others must do the work instead of you. Therefore, look for obstacles to performance (and therefore frustration for your staff) and have regular discussions to remove the obstacles.

### **One more place to look**

Finally, you should **ask yourself whether performance matters at all. Is it possible that your staff doesn't have any idea what is truly important to you?**

There is an axiom which says..."**People do what is INspected, not what is EXpected**".

Often leaders set forth challenging objectives at the beginning of the year. Then they follow up on virtually none of them, and wonder why, at the end of the year, very few have been accomplished.

In another article, we will discuss establishing performance targets with the staff. One of the key elements of that process is making sure **everyone** participates.

Once targets have been established, leaders must continually reinforce progress toward the targets through regular feed back.

Emery Air Freight Company was experiencing substantial losses. The problem: virtually all of their air cargo containers were going out less than half filled. When workers were told about this, they had no idea it was important to fill the containers.

Rather than lectures on the economic impact of shipping lots of partially filled containers, the leaders started a simple program of positive reinforcement. Workers were reinforced for accurately reporting which containers went out full, but *they were also reinforced* for honestly reported containers not going out filled.

It became clear very quickly to workers that leaders were interested in the status of containers. When we tell this story to leaders attending our programs, they often ask how long it took until most of the containers were going out filled.

### **Slightly less than seventy two hours.**

**How long has it been since you have congratulated a member of your staff for doing something right?** Often when employees have 19 or 20 things to get done, get 15 or 16 completed on time, they only hear about the ones they didn't get done.

## **4 things your staff wants to know**

There are four things your staff wants to know on a regular basis:

- 1. What am I supposed to do?**
- 2. Why do you want me to do it?**
- 3. How good is "good"?**
- 4. How am I doing?**

Does everyone on your staff know what you expect of them? Have you ever been accused of being a person of mystery? Do you fly off the handle because something wasn't done, when perhaps you never explained that it should be done?

Do your employees understand why getting as much work done in a given day is good to them? Work will never be exciting to them as long as they think the only reason they must do it is to improve profitability and amenities for you. What's in it for them?

How good is "good"? Are your employees capable of keeping their own score card? As long as your staff knows what the minimum standards are for various areas of their work, they don't have to ask whether or not they got the job done right. They know.

If you were gone to a convention, and your staff needed to critique their own performance and compare it with what know you would be looking for, could they do it.

Establishing performance standards is not some complex and cumbersome task like creating a corporate policy manual. It simply means that you and each employee should mutually understand and agree upon what you think is an acceptable level of performance.

It's possible that you might expect more sales from one salesperson than another, and both could be doing a very good job.

This style of leadership takes a great deal of pressure off year-end performance reviews.



Every person knows from the first of the year what will be expected to receive a positive evaluation...and perhaps a raise.

It would be handy if you could periodically pour a quart of “motivational oil” into the ears of your staff when they need it? It's just not that simple.

Some employees will be excited and begin to improve performance quickly if you install some of the ideas from this article. Others will test your patience, but eventually “get with the program.” Others will do virtually nothing. At that point, you must ask yourself where you should spend your time.

The Italian philosopher, Pareto, taught us that virtually all of life operates on a twenty-eighty principal. Twenty percent of the workers do eighty percent of the work. Twenty percent of the product line produces eighty percent of the sales.

Don't allow yourself to devote a great of time or energy with those who have chosen not to perform well and work with the team. By spending time with them, you are simply reinforcing what they hope to accomplish. They want a great deal of attention and a lot of opportunity to offer excuses why they don't get things done.

**Spend your time where you get results.** Ask your best workers how the work can be done better and:

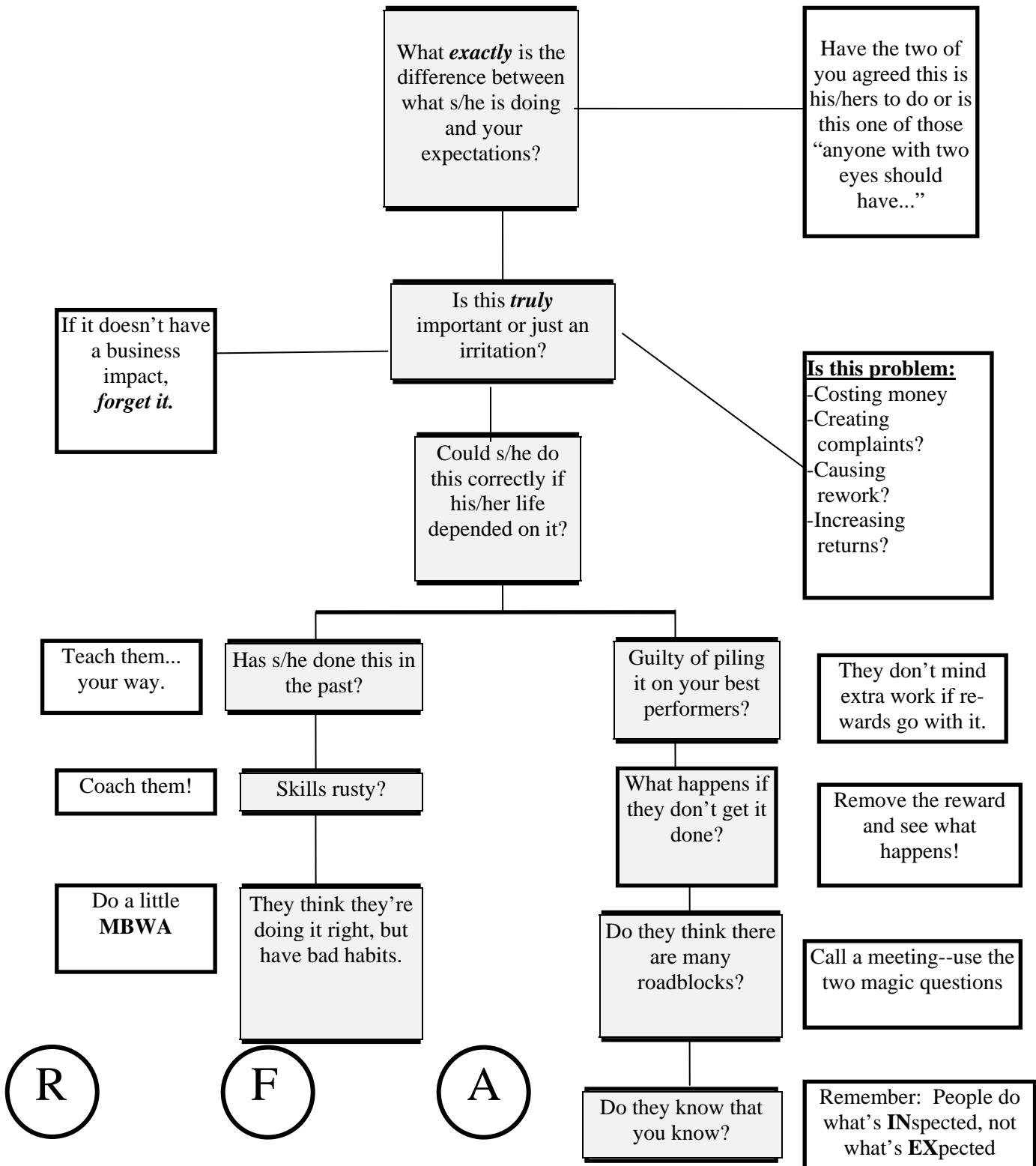
COMPENSATE THEM FAIRLY

RECOGNIZE THEM PUBLICLY

THANK THEM OFTEN

MOTIVATE THEM.

# Common Sense Motivation



# Getting the Team to Function As a Team

Perhaps nothing in a working career is more frustrating (or rewarding) than supervising people. Certainly there are many rewards and joys that come with watching people grow and develop to their potential. But, times occur when people do not accomplish as much as they are capable of accomplishing.

The job of leadership involves shaping and guiding a group of people to achieve some kind of common purpose. The frustration arises when those people either do not want to accomplish the task at hand or put a great deal of effort into accomplishing the wrong thing.

The actual definition of management is: ***Getting Things Done...Through Other People***. When we study the two parts of the definition, there are potentially two different thoughts. If one were to emphasize the first half, the mission would appear to be that the most important issue is to "Get Things Done." Emphasizing the other half of the definition seems to imply that the primary mission is to find ways to get other people involved.

As it turns out, the two do in fact go together. Great leaders are focused on multiplying themselves. They know what needs to be done, and they rally the staff to take ownership of various parts of the tasks.

Perhaps an analogy might be the parenting of children. All of us want the very best for our children. We wish them to accomplish more in life than we accomplished. The frustration comes when they either lose the desire to accomplish or become misdirected or end up headed down an unproductive path.

Taking the analogy of parenting and comparing it with the leadership of people, we can see one of the common problems we face within our own staffs.

Almost every leader ends up in the role of management primarily because he or she was

extremely successful at some lower level position. For example, parts managers were formally parts counter salespeople. After a long and generally distinguished career in sales, companies essentially says, "You've been so good at what you do that we're going to promote you to management. From this day forward you're to go forth and do 'management things.' You are never again to do things which brought you raises, recognition, and, ultimately, a promotion. From this day forward, you are to supervise others who probably will never be as good as you on your worst day. Your success will hinge on their successes. Enjoy your new job."

It's at this point that the frustration begins. Most leaders know how to do the job better than their subordinates. At least that should be the case in the *beginning* of their management careers. Shortly after promotion, we have high levels of technical skill. Over a period of time, however, others who report to us should actually become better at doing the task than we are.

**The point? There comes a time for every leader when his/her subordinates truly are capable of doing the work better.** At that point, they no longer look to the leader for guidance on how to do the job; instead they start looking for guidance on where the team or the organization is headed.

## Creating a Sense of "Ownership"

One of the first responsibilities of leaders is that of delegating responsibility to others. Often, new leaders have great difficulty with this. Leaders must pass on to employees the necessary responsibility, authority and accountability they need to do the job.

Unless leaders are willing to delegate some essential elements, they cannot expect a high degree of commitment from subordinates. These are the things that develop a sense of "ownership" in the job.

Proper delegation is difficult for leaders because they are simply unwilling to "cut the cord" and allow staff to control certain parts of how jobs will be performed.

Without experience in goal setting and decision making, staff members don't feel the sense of ownership of the job. However, as the group matures, more decision making should be delegated and less limitations placed on their work.

## Management by Objectives

A few years ago, Dr. Peter Drucker wrote a book in which he explained why a major American automobile company seemed to be producing phenomenal results in all phases of their operations. He described a process which at that time was unnamed but later became known as *Management by Objectives*. In the years that followed Drucker's book, others began to write about the phenomenon called *Management by Objectives*, *Management for Results* and other title variations of the same basic theme.

The idea is that at the beginning of any operating period, leaders sit down with the team and mutually establish targets of performance that can later be measured. The key, of course, is to set performance targets that are meaningful to the organization and will produce an improvement. The leader must then follow up on the objectives that have been established and use them as the primary base point for year-end evaluations of each employee.

Unfortunately, as happens with many management theories, the concept of Management by Objectives (MBO) began to develop a life of its own.

There were management consultants who said employee groups could accomplish more if they simply wrote objectives. Over a period of time, the real work that made MBO actually work began to disappear from the process. Employees wrote objectives at the beginning of the year (or operating period), and never looked at them again until the end of the year.

At that point MBO had become nothing more than an exercise in paperwork. Although the concept is a good one, leaders must understand that it's simply a concept or explanation of *something that good leaders must be doing on a regular basis anyway*.

The "glue" that holds MBO together is the situation in which team members get part of the action in the goal

setting and decision making process. The employees' opinions and suggestions are respected. Leaders who seek and honor the input of their employees understands the synergistic effect it has on the team (i.e., "none of us is as smart as all of us").

Employees want to be responsible for the productivity of the group. They want to view it as "my job," "my input," "my output," "my decisions," etc. Most staff members want a sense of responsibility for meeting group objectives, for getting things done. Without this sense of ownership, the job will not get done with the same quality, regardless of the leader's demands.

## "Homeowners" Attitude

The concepts of management used by the Japanese have been studied very heavily in the past 20 years. The Japanese seem to be without equal in their ability to involve employees in the process of determining how the work should be done.

There was a documentary on television showing a Japanese man leaving an automobile factory at the end of his workday. Although he had put in a full day and had worked at that plant for a number of years, as he walked from the plant to his commuter train, he passed the cars that had been produced that day. With each car, he looked, sometimes stopped, and did such things as straighten a windshield wiper blade.

He had so much pride in the cars he and others in the plant had produced that he could not stand the sight of an imperfection. Do your employees feel that way about the work they do?

## Vision

A verse in the Bible (Proverbs 19:18) states something that kind of applies to what we're discussing. It says, "*Without a vision the people will perish.*" Without something to work for, or toward, work becomes a frustrating process.

People who teach the concepts of time management constantly remind leaders of how important it is to use their days properly so they will not find themselves working under pressure to meet important deadlines.

The interesting thing, however, is that most of us do work better under some pressure.

In fact, when something important must be done (and when we know the importance of getting it done), we both physically and psychologically turn on the energy. People have an amazing capacity to accomplish a great deal more when they feel a sense of urgency. But, it's a stressful way to live.

### **The Consequences of Dehumanizing Work**

Although Henry Ford was considered one of the major innovators in the industrial revolution of the United States, he could also be viewed as a person who did much to de-motivate American workers.

Mr. Ford believed that a quality product could be made by low skilled workers.

With this concept in mind, he took the construction of an automobile and broke it down into small incremental tasks that required little thinking. He was then able to hire workers with low levels of craftsmanship, pay them an attractive wage...and produce many more cars per hour.

He was correct. Lower skilled workers could produce a number of reasonably good quality products. Unfortunately for American labor and management, many of the people were low skilled but not low intelligence workers. They had a great deal of ability and initiative. By removing all of the thinking, creativity and craftsmanship from their work, automobile plants dehumanized the work so much that it became boring and tedious.

Over a period of time, those workers began to demand higher wages. The wages requested had little to do with compensation for skill, but lots to do with compensation for boredom. This mushroomed into the formation of the United Auto Workers, and over the years, salaries rose to a point that they were three times their counterparts in Japan.

In addition, there was little incentive for them to work faster, so they negotiated contracts allowing them to work slower.

Over a period of time, they slowed their work down to a point where their Japanese counterparts were producing three cars for every one American workers produced. Japanese workers were producing three times as many cars for one-third the labor costs of US cars. You know the rest of the story.

### **Getting Employees Involved**

How is it that Japanese workers can feel so good about their work and Americans feel so badly? Perhaps the answer lies in the fundamental difference in the way the automobile is designed.

In Japan, design engineers put a newly designed car together, and almost immediately the workers are brought in to evaluate the car to see if there are ways to do their various assembly jobs better or more efficiently. Then every week, as they are building automobiles, they continue to analyze that part of the car they are assembling to look for further refinements.

As a consequence, the Japanese are now thought to be the producers of the best quality automobiles in the world.

What is the difference in the United States? The difference is that (until very recently) automobiles were designed by engineers. Then, complete specifications on how the assembly jobs would be performed were written by people greatly removed from the production process.

Some years ago, a Ford plant near Kansas City received the assignment to assemble the Ford Tempo and Mercury Topaz. Those automobiles were designed in Detroit, and a prototype model was assembled and shipped to Kansas City.

The workers were allowed to see it for the first time and disassemble it to see how it was constructed. One of the workers who regularly assembled interior door panels noticed the door panel and its various components (arm rest, window crank, etc.) were put together with nine different metal screws.

When he asked why, it was because several different subcontractors were supplying various parts for the

door. He mentioned how time consuming it would be for him to rummage around to find nine different sheet metal screws when one size was capable of doing all of it.

*It's this kind of observation by workers that produces increased productivity and commitment to the work.*

## ESTABLISHING PERFORMANCE TARGETS

### I. Set the Overall Target

It is absolutely critical that staff be part of the process of establishing performance targets. Leaders must establish the primary objectives. Somebody has to be the leader and provide a "vision" for the people.

However, at that point, staff must become highly involved with deciding how the work will be done and how it will be measured.

Fundamentally, there are only four things that your staff really wants to know:

1. What am I supposed to do?
2. Why am I supposed to do it?
3. How good is "good?"
4. How am I doing?

The first three questions deal specifically with defining jobs and establishing performance standards. The process of goal setting provides leaders and staff (simultaneously) an opportunity to agree and commit to the jobs that must be done in the period ahead.

Dr. David McClelland at Harvard University did some research to discover what stopped people from achieving important goals.

He discovered that a surprisingly small percentage of the population (10%), were truly achievement motivated by themselves. It is likely that very few people who report to you are truly the "self starters" we so often talk about.

In looking more closely at those whom McClelland termed "achievers," he found similar characteristics among them:

-Achievers *set their own goals*.

-They were unlikely to accept goals forced on them by others.

-They *avoided extremes* of difficulty in setting goals.

-Achievers seemed to select the most difficult but attainable challenges they felt they could handle.

-Achievers tended to select tasks that provided some form of *immediate feedback*.

When your staff is not challenged to think about how they might accomplish an important goal, they can simply dismiss it as something that is ridiculous ("Another dumb thing management wants us to do").

At the end of the year, when the leader sits down with the staff to discuss how they did on accomplishing the goal, he/she discovers that each staff member has a similar story. They say, "You set the goal. You never asked us how it could be done. We knew it couldn't be done, so we worked on other things."

What then are some of the principle steps required of a leader to pull off this task of establishing exciting but achievable goals, and getting staff to take ownership of them?

First, leaders must realize that they are viewed as the primary source of information about where the organization is going. It is necessary for leaders to periodically provide information to staff about what's going on.

### Employees Detect What's Going On

This does not mean sitting down with your staff and divulging every single thing that's going on. Some of the bad news employers sometimes have to pass along (such as cutbacks) may not need to be described in detail. However, it's amazing how intuitive employees are about situations within the organization. They know when "things aren't going well" and talk to each other. Unfortunately, they sometimes start rumors and/or come to conclusions that are not only incorrect but very de-motivating.

Why then are leaders so reluctant to periodically visit with their people and talk about the state of the business? There are a number of reasons, but most

of them have to do with fear that staff cannot handle the information properly. Generally, the reverse is true.

Employees are intelligent enough to know what the problems of the organization are (even if they don't have hard statistics).

Only by sharing with them what's going on can they become concerned enough to figure out what they might be able to do to correct the problem.

Consider an analogy of a father losing his job. Some fathers are honest, come home and tell their families about the unfortunate situation. They talk with the family about what might need to be done in coming weeks or months for the family to survive. It's interesting how families can rally around the situation, and things which previously seemed very important, are demoted or dropped...in view of the new condition.

Other fathers lose their positions, never mention it to the family, and although the family is aware there must be a problem (in the sense they can tell "something is wrong with Dad"), they don't know what the problem is. Consequently, they can do virtually nothing to help.

### Open the Curtains

Leaders, you don't need to share all of the details of your profit and loss statement, but *staff should know (or at least receive confirmation), of the things they probably suspect.*

Next, leaders must realize that employees are more likely to know how to do the job than their leaders. Even if that may not be the case, start with that assumption.

Without providing specific details on your expectations for improvement in important responsibilities of the store (customer relations, expense control, etc.), ask them what they think may be realistic.

Goals should deal with more than just giant operational issues. Simple improvement in day-to-day work can bring huge changes in job satisfaction

and performance. In other words, if they're designing a car door with nine sheet metal screws in it, let them figure out how to simplify the task.

## II. The Sweat Is In The Details. Let Employees Decide the Details

Don't stop with asking what they can accomplish. Move on and ask how they think it can accomplish.

One of the amazing secrets to goal setting is realizing people seldom accomplish goals they don't see as specific. In fact, the more specific the goal, the more likely they are to break it down into bite-size pieces.

In a store like yours, a goal like "*Making it easier for customers to get product information*" could be a good target. What does "*easier*" look like? Start by giving some "*How Good Is Good*" definition to the outcome. Then, staff can break the goal into specific actions...*that they believe will accomplish the desired result.*

## III. All Tasks Are Not Equal. Prioritize Goals

When staff has developed a list of specific results or goals they think are achievable, and will improve the overall environment of the store, you can begin setting some priorities for the goals...not everything on the list is of equal importance.

It's important for staff to determine the most important thing to do, then *tell* you...rather than you telling them. If they come up with some priorities that you feel are badly out of sequence, you're free to mention it. But, it's psychologically more powerful for your staff to say, "*We think we should do this first,*" and allow you to agree.

It is generally true that some goals established at the beginning of the year are later eliminated because they turned out to be inappropriate or unnecessary. The important thing:

***At The Time Goals Are Established, Both You And Your Employees Must Agree That They Seem Important.***

#### IV. Establish Deadlines

Once employees have developed a list and established priorities to the various things to be accomplished, the leader and the employees should individually agree upon target dates for follow-up. When would be fair and reasonable to expect that the goal will be accomplished?

It's unproductive for employees to begin an operating period with a list of things to be completed at various times, and then not be periodically evaluated on progress.

#### V. Employees Do What Is Inspected, Not What's Expected

If staff members established a goal for the first quarter of the year and something else for the second quarter, it would be reasonable for them to expect you to begin immediate following-up on the first quarter goal...but not the one for the second.

It is good for staff members to know you're following up on something assigned for the first quarter. Without this follow-up, it tends to imply the goal was either not important or that something more important is currently happening in the company.

As the year progresses, follow-up and feedback become the most important part of the process. Plaques at the end of the year are nice, but feedback shortly following the performance is critical. ***Put a small handwritten note on an employee report. Take a walk to the break to congratulate a staff member (shortly after a customer has called to say how pleased he was with the service he received). Immediate feedback is worth 10 to 20 times the value what a plaque ...when presented months after the good actions.***

Employees watch to see if they receive periodic feedback on progress toward targets. If they establish objective but never hear from you about them, they figure out the goals must not be important to you.

If they receive lots of congratulations for doing things not related to major goals, they figure out how to

avoid working on the targeted activities (especially if they are rather challenging ***and*** they would like to do easier things instead...***and*** they are getting kudos for doing insignificant stuff).

#### No Surprises at the End of the Year

All of this leads us to the year-end performance appraisal. It should be a piece of cake in an environment like we're describing.

Both you and your staff should walk into the interview knowing exactly what was agreed to at the beginning of the year. Both should know before you ever sit down, whether or not the goals have been accomplished. Therefore, you don't have to prepare for a "bad news" interview with an employee, and he or she doesn't have to sit around trying to think of excuses for not accomplishing the goal.

***It's amazing how much people accomplish when they know what the target is.***

#### It's Tough to Hit a Target you Can't See-Impossible to Hit One You Don't Have

Howard Hill was considered the greatest archer who ever lived. He won 294 consecutive archery tournaments. He was forced into early retirement. When he entered archery tournaments, other archers would drop out.

In one filmed demonstration of his skills, he shot an arrow at a target 50 yards away. He hit the target dead center. He then shot a second arrow and split the first one with the second.

Without a doubt, even if you've never held a bow in your life, with only 20 minutes of basic instruction you could be ready to beat Howard Hill on the best day he ever lived. The only thing upon which we insist is that Howard Hill be blindfolded before the contest.

You see, it's absolutely impossible to hit a target you can't see. It is impossible to hit a target you don't have. The problem with most work groups is that they do an outstanding job of working hard on things which are totally inconsequential. Or, they work very hard at doing things they largely don't understand, and



therefore cannot support. All they know is that "the boss wants us to get this done."

A researcher named Northcote Parkinson did some interesting experiments with various kinds of employees. In one experiment, he took a group of secretaries who averaged typing 10 letters per hour, cut their work in half so they only had five letters to type. It still took them an hour to type the five letters.

He then took the same group and increased their load to 15 letters per hour. The hour he chose was the last hour of the day. The letters had to get out that day, and they knew they either had to do them during the established working hours or stay late.

Interestingly, they got all fifteen done.

Parkinson then theorized that, "***work tends to expand to fill the available time.***" His research has been proven time and time again with different employee groups. Most employees are perfectly

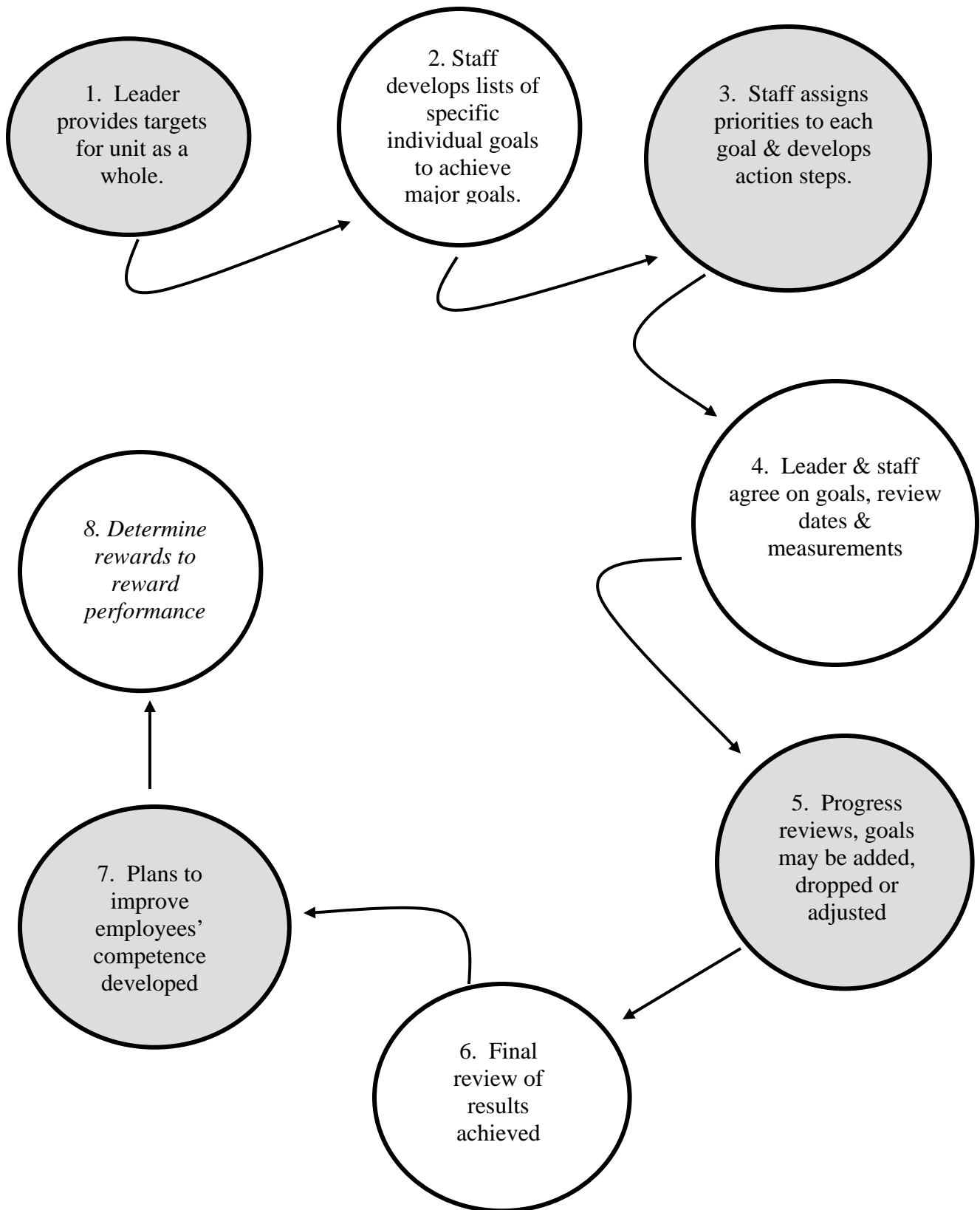
capable of accomplishing a great deal more than they are now accomplishing, but the work has been allowed to expand to fill the available time.

Employees probably know 90% of the things they need to do to increase the profitability and productivity of your organization. Only by building participative management techniques...particularly in the area of goal setting...do you tap this energy.

Following are some diagrams showing this process as it might occur during a goal setting and completion cycle. Sit down and think carefully about where you need the organization to be. Before you tell the employees what their new goals are, why not establish a picture of where you want to go and why.

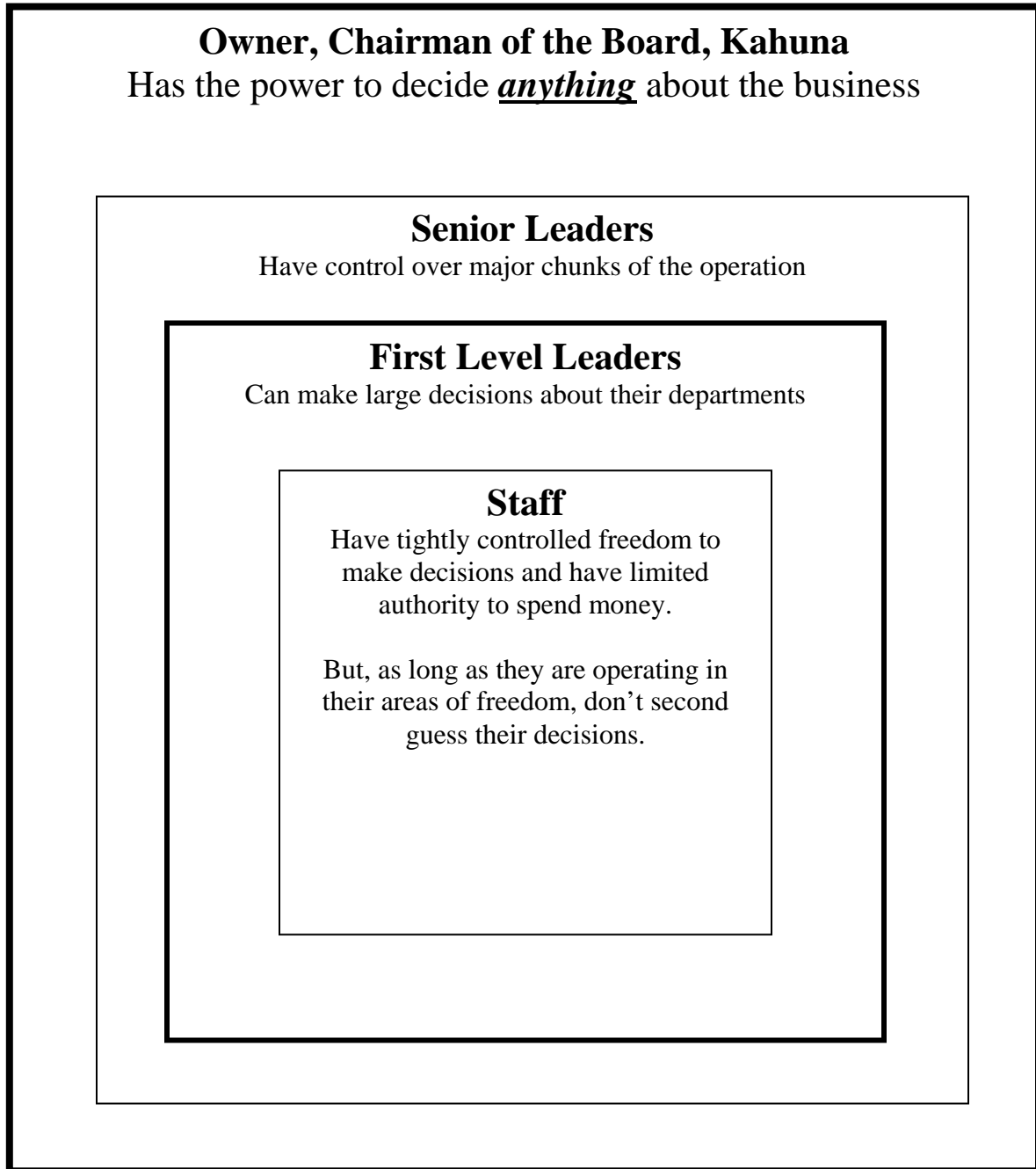
Put that in a story that you can tell your employees. Then, ask them to sit with you and, one-on-one, strategize how they think they might accomplish the various things that must be done. You'll be amazed at the results.

# Performance Planning and Review Cycle

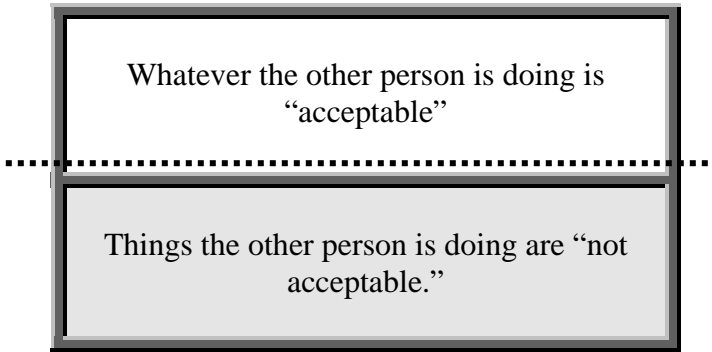


# Areas of Freedom

To successfully delegate, the person to whom something is being delegated must have both a sense of responsibility to successfully complete the assignment **AND** the full authority to make decisions within defined boundaries. Here's an illustration.



# How to Listen so People Talk

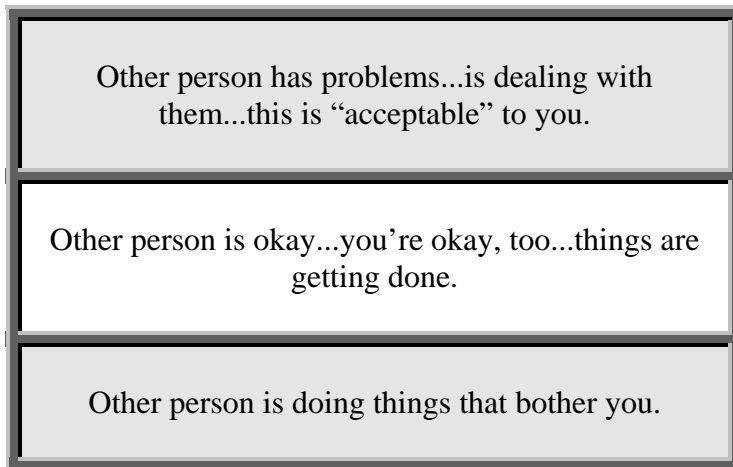


The line between “acceptable” and “not acceptable” moves for three reasons.

1. YOU
2. OTHER PERSON
3. PLACE

The “Relationship Rectangle” was designed by Dr. Thomas Gordon, author of **LEADER EFFECTIVENESS TRAINING** and **TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS TRAINING.**

**If we are fair in the ways we deal with people around us, we increase productivity.**



Listening helps... the other person probably doesn’t want advice.

-----  
You can laugh, poke fun, give advice... and still be okay.

-----  
You will have to say something to make a change.

## What Would You Say?

| The Scene   | What The Other Person Said To You   | What Would You Say Or Do? |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| <p>There was a small electrical fire in the break room this morning, a toilet flooded minutes ago; the flu caused a shortage of three staff people, so you are helping in various ways. <b>A salesperson comes to you and says,</b></p> | <p><i>“We’re out of paper towels in the restroom. I just took the last one. I need someone to get some right away! We won’t have any for tomorrow morning.”</i></p>   |                           |
| <p><b>The son of a farmer</b> (who periodically buys parts from us) has bought a combine. His family previously only owned competing equipment. He seems very happy about his decision, but recently said...</p>                        | <p><i>“Dad is having a lot of trouble with my decision. He has been on Brand X equipment all his life and is taking some heat from his dealer about my decision.”</i></p>   |                           |
| <p><b>You’re visiting with a person on your maintenance staff.</b> You ask an innocent question, “So, how are things going?” He says,</p>   | <p><i>“People are amazing. A couple of days ago, I was backing out of a parking spot in the city. I didn’t see the guy behind me, and he didn’t see me backing out. Our bumpers barely touched, we looked, agreed there was no damage and drove away. Today, I get a call from a lawyer saying the guy has body and engine damage and is suing me!”</i></p> |                           |
| <p><b>You see a receptionist who is visibly shaken,</b> in tears, headed to the restroom. You asked what happened. She said,</p>  | <p><i>“Every time Mr. Buster comes in he yells at me. He’s the rudest, meanest man I know. He just ruins my whole day!”</i></p>   |                           |

| The Scene  | What The Other Person Said To You   | What Would You Say Or Do? |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| <p><b>A customer has just walked in</b> the door. You said, “Good morning. How are you today?” He says,</p>  | <p><i>“I’ve tried to call this place for last couple of days. All I get is a busy signal. You people must be on the computer all the time or leave the phone off the hook.”</i></p>   |                           |
| <p>You’re conducting a routine morning staff meeting and notice that <b>a salesperson is distracted</b> and not responding to questions from others. You said, “Bob, where is your head?” He says,</p> | <p><i>“I thought we had everything settled for Mr. Adams to take delivery on a bailer. We got it service and out to his place the next day after he said he’d take it. I called to schedule delivery, and he said they found another one and is going to buy it.”</i></p> |                           |
| <p><b>You’re talking with a customer</b> who hasn’t been in recently. You’ve already said, “Good to see you. How’s it going?” He replies with...</p>   | <p><i>“You want to know something? You were right. I bought some will-fit stuff, and it’s junk. I guess you get what you pay for.”</i></p>  |                           |
| <p>In a performance review with a <b>newer employee</b>, you ask how she’s adjusting the work and the store. She says,</p>   | <p><i>“I don’t think this place really cares about people. We don’t have any insurance, one stinking week of vacation, and really short breaks.”</i></p>  |                           |

# Communication Roadblocks

## **We Don't Remember Much of What We Hear**

There are many times when people talk to us, and we don't remember what they said. During World War II, studies showed that immediately following situations where one person talked to another, the person who was supposed to be listening remembered less than ten percent of what was just said. Three days later retention slipped to two percent. Why is it that in a business like ours where listening is so important we hear so little?

There are several reasons we don't hear what others try to tell us. First, there is a tendency to daydream. The average person talks at the rate of about 250 words per minute. The slowest thinker thinks at the rate of 500+ WPM, and fast thinkers can roll on at the rate of nearly 1000. This simply means that a listener has a great deal of excess mental time when others are talking. We tend to fill this time by thinking of other things. There are many times in a "typical" day when someone talks to you, finishes and says to you, "What do you think?" and you say, "I'm sorry. What did you say?"

## **Tuning Out**

We also have tendencies to pre-judge what others are saying. Based on the person, you assume in advance the information is either important or not important. If you assume what you are about to hear is unimportant, as hard as the other person might try to get her/his points across, it's unlikely that you'll hear much of what they're really saying.

Finally, business people have a strong tendency to listen for the "bottom line." We tend to disregard a great deal of the verbiage employees pack in and around their ideas. Instead, we try to sort it down to a few main points. In fact, many leaders even say to their employees "get to the point".

We are all guilty of each of these at one time or another. They are natural tendencies. Learning how to control them, however, is the key to increasing your ability to listen and therefore open the communication gates between you and your people.

## **Communication Roadblocks**

There are eight common verbal roadblocks to communication between others and us. Roadblocks can create serious problems in the communication process, and sometimes can actually shut down rather than open communications.

### **Make the Issue Seem Smaller**

One roadblock is unintentionally denying what the other person is saying or trying to distract them. This happens when someone begins to talk about a problem, and we immediately realize that the problem is not big. Instead of letting them describe the problem, as they see it, we try to ease the pain by telling them that, by comparison, the problem could be far worse... "Well, look on the bright side. At least you didn't have it as bad as..." or "I'm sure there's just a small misunderstanding. Don't make it bigger than it is."

Whether we mean to say it or not, the message is, “You’re silly for worrying about that.” Of course, it may be a trivial issue, but telling others their concerns are trivial compounds the problem. They were worried about something, got up enough nerve to talk to you then quickly discovered they were put down for not having something as big as a hurricane to report.

### **Trying To “Cheer Up” The Other Person**

The second way we kill communication is when we try to “cheer up” others. We say things like, “*Just hold on. You’re a good person; the others are going to see that*” or “*You never know, maybe something good will come out of it after all*” or “*Well, it’s probably a one time event, and it’s behind you now.*” Even if all these things are true, at the moment others begin to tell us about problems, the issue is not so much the problem as the fact that they want to talk about it.

Attempting to “cheer up” tells others that they should not talk to you about concerns but instead internalize problems. This roadblock is often an out growth of the way we raise our children. We try to keep them happy and positive. We often say things like, “That same kind of thing happened to me when I was a kid and...” Frankly, people don’t care if something similar happened to you. It’s happening to them right now, they’re upset about it, and don’t want to be told that their concerns is unimportant.

### **Me-Tooing**

When people start telling you about a problem, it immediately triggers a memory of something similar that has happened to you, and before they finish, you have started to “Me-too”.

Those who had a problem now get to listen to you. Their worse suspicions are confirmed. The event they experienced is not isolated, it could reoccur, and worst of all there appears to be no solution to it. Bite your tongue. You might learn something new.

### **Providing Advice or Direction**

When staff members begin to tell us about problems, we sometimes say things like, “Let me tell you what I’d do about that...here’s the best way to handle that...” After all, problem-solving is our key role...right?

Unfortunately, when we attempt to solve the problems of others it can back fire. If the solution you give doesn’t work, who is likely to be blamed? In addition, if the solution does work, what is likely to happen the next time the person has a problem? There is an underlying concern in giving advice. When you offer it too quickly, you deny opportunities for others to “figure it out.”

### **Rescuing...Stepping In to Solve the Problem**

This happens when people come with problems, and we immediately take ownership. We say things like, “I’ll handle it right away...let me straighten that out for you.” We want staff and family members to be happy, and we jump on the band wagon of problem solving too quickly. This is particularly dangerous when one of your employees has a problem with another employee. You find yourself in a vicious triangle by stepping into the middle of a situation in which it’s almost impossible for you to come away unscarred.



## Asking questions

At times, when people begin telling of their concerns, instead of just listening and allowing them to draw conclusions about what to do next or why something happened the way it did, we try to help them by asking classic “newspaper questions” (who, what, where, when, why and how).

On the surface, it would seem questioning would help others get to the bottom of a problem. Unfortunately, often the opposite is true. When we begin with direct questions, others start to feel they are being interrogated and perhaps...after providing us with enough information...we will show them how they actually caused the problem.

## Blaming, criticizing, saying, “I told you so”

The most obvious roadblock is one we call “Blaming or Criticizing”. It happens when people tell us of a mistake they have made, and we verbally smack them with statements like, “*You probably brought this on yourself by...*” or “*Hey, didn’t I tell you?*” Of the roadblocks we have mentioned so far, this one quickly teaches people that sharing problems can be a painful experience.

## Deflecting and/or counter-attacking

This is particularly common when problem is about us. They begin to describe something we’re doing (or had a part in doing) that they don't like. Instead of listening to their perspective, we counter-attack by saying things like, “Wait just a minute. You don't have all of the facts. You don't have any idea what you're talking about, and if you were in my shoes you would have done the exact same thing.”

It can also be seen in a situation where the troubled person is talking about issues over which we have no control...and we may even agree with them. In these cases, others often know we can't change things. Mostly, they just wanted someone to listen.

All of us have done many or all of these roadblocks at one time or another. We don't mean to shut down communications, but we do. We do it in the way we reply to our co-workers, customers...and our own family members.

Remember the most important rule...***LISTEN FIRST***. None of the above replies are roadblocks if others know we have heard and seem to understand their concerns.

**LISTEN FIRST**...then help...*if you can and want to.*

# Characteristics We Seek In Listeners

## Acceptance

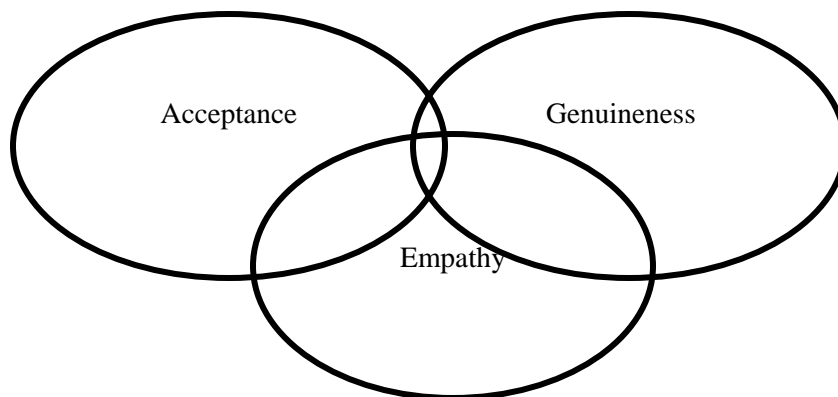
As a base line, people need to feel they can say what's really on their minds. Often acceptance can be demonstrated by doing nothing more than keeping our mouths shut. Roadblocks quickly indicate we think something is “wrong” with the troubled person.

## Genuineness

One step higher from saying nothing is “looking interested.” An effective way to do this is through the sparing use of non-committal replies...like most women do natively.

## Empathy

At the highest level, people want to be understood. Only Active Listening does this. When we both hear and see what is said, we can join the conversation by feeding back what was *really* said...words plus the way the message was wrapped the expression.



## **“Rules Of The Road” for Listening**

Roadblocks often put us in the role of adviser.

The problem belongs to the other person. Let him/her solve it.

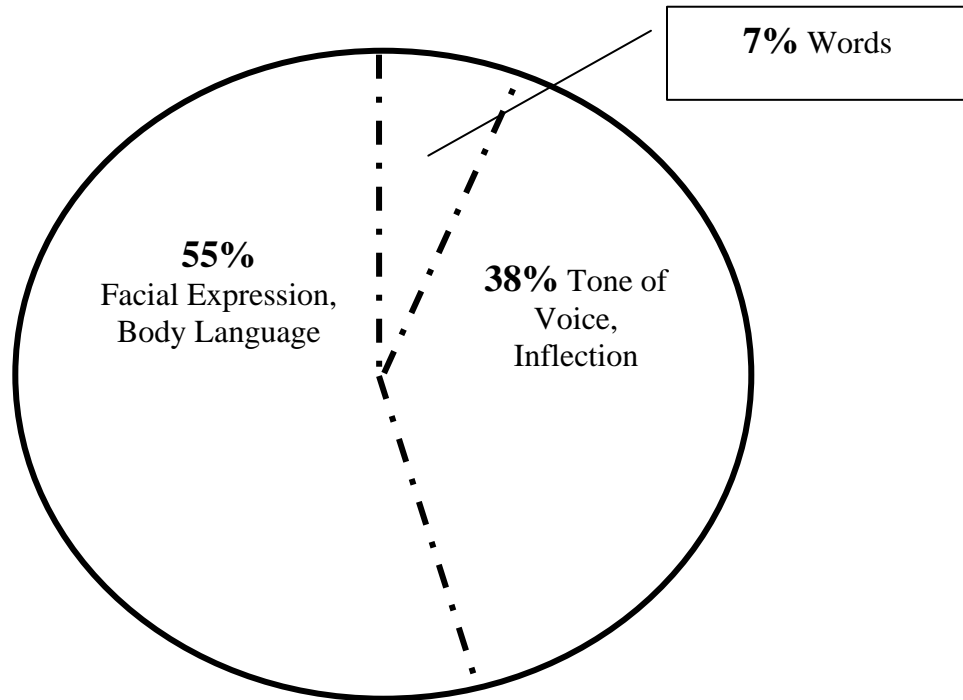
Don't “play like” we're listening when we are too busy or too short on time.

Don't take it to extremes. We can sense when others feel understood.

**Then we can offer suggestions.**

# Listen With Your Eyes

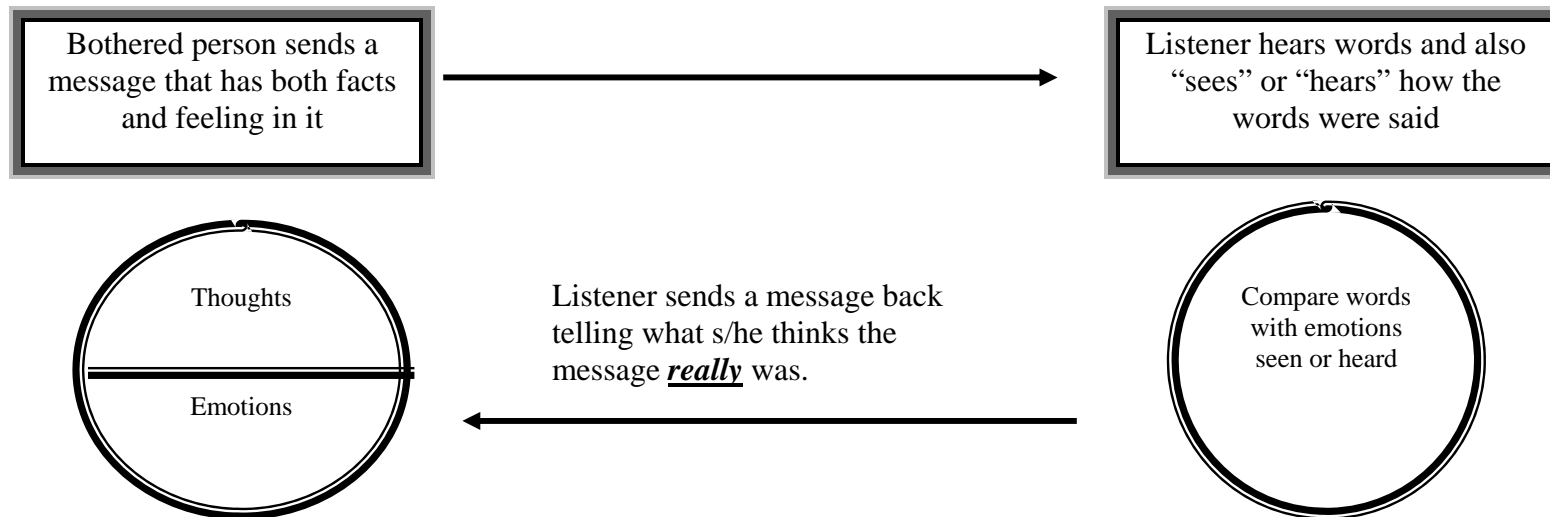
Among other important research, San Francisco State University studied the way in which we communicate with each other. This diagram illustrates how most of what we say is **not** carried in words:



**The need to be understood is so great** that errors listeners make when attempting to identify the emotion of the talker are not only forgiven, they are most often corrected by the talker... *“No, I’m not a little bothered. I’m so mad I could bite a nail in two!”*

It seems that **saying what you heard and/or saw** (but may not have been spoken) is the key to getting the talker defused. Once defused, the listener may discuss solutions or offer suggestions. However, solutions and advice given prior to attempting to identify the emotions generally become roadblocks and cause the talker to be less willing to work at solving the problem or releasing on the emotion.

# If You Could “See” The Dynamics of Active Listening



Don't worry about being "*right*" when you are trying to accurately feedback feelings...When you're wrong, talkers almost always correct... "*No, I'm not a **little** upset. I'm so mad I could bite someone's head off.*"

Active Listening is a copyrighted term owned by Gordon Training International

## Active Listening--Feedback Feelings Not Said

| The situation  | The other person said.  | What would you say? |
|--|---|---------------------|
| <p>You are a manager. You have a request for new equipment you need to get typed. You place it on the corner of the secretary's desk and say, <i>"I won't need this until...(three days from now)."</i> It's a small document, and you are giving her three days because she is often busy with work for others.</p> | <p><b><u>HOLD IT!!!</u></b> You expect me to get all this done in three days.</p>   |                     |
| <p>A yard person just piped off to a customer (who said some very rude things to him). You rounded a corner, witnessed only the last part of what must have been an ugly scene. You asked to technician to step outside to discuss the matter. He says,</p>  | <p><i>"Okay, so I was wrong. I said I was sorry. What more do you want?"</i></p>  |                     |
| <p>You see a fellow staff member leaving for the day. She looks pretty glum, so you said, <i>"Maria, is everything okay?"</i></p>  | <p><i>"All I ever hear about is when I didn't do something right. No one ever says, "Thanks" around here."</i></p>                                    |                     |
| <p>The very good customer who seldom complains is at the counter and visibly upset.</p>  | <p><i>"Would someone tell me what's going on with my order. Three times I have been told, "We will have it today, and I still don't have it!"</i></p> |                     |

# Emotions People Have but Sometimes Fail to Say

|              |                |              |              |                |
|--------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Abandoned    | Diminished     | Hurt         | Pain         | Suffering      |
| Adequate     | Discontented   | Hysterical   | Panicked     | Sure           |
| Adamant      | Distracted     |              | Parsimonious | Sympathetic    |
| Affectionate | Distraught     | Ignored      | Peaceful     |                |
| Agony        | Disturbed      | Immortal     | Persecuted   | Talkative      |
| Almighty     | Dominated      | Imposed upon | Petrified    | Tempted        |
| Ambivalent   | Divided        | Impressed    | Pity         | Tenacious      |
| Angry        | Dubious        | Infatuated   | Pleasant     | Tenuous        |
| Annoyed      |                | Infuriated   | Pleased      | Tense          |
| Anxious      | Eager          | Inspired     | Precarious   | Tentative      |
| Apathetic    | Ecstatic       | Intimidated  | Pressured    | Terrible       |
| Astounded    | Electrified    | Isolated     | Pretty       | Terrified      |
| Awed         | Empty          |              | Prim         | Threatened     |
|              | Enchanted      | Jealous      | Prissy       | Tired          |
| Bad          | Energetic      | Joyous       | Proud        | Thwarted       |
| Beautiful    | Energated      | Jumpy        |              | Trapped        |
| Betrayed     | Enjoying       |              | Quarrelsome  | Troubled       |
| Bitter       | Envious        | Kicky        | Queer        |                |
| Blissful     | Excited        | Kind         |              | Ugly           |
| Bold         | Evil           | Keen         |              | Uneasy         |
| Bored        | Exasperated    |              | Rage         | Unsettled      |
| Brave        | Exhausted      |              | Rapture      |                |
| Burdened     |                | Laconic      | Refreshed    |                |
|              | Fascinated     | Lazy         | Rejected     | Violent        |
| Calm         | Fawning        | Lecherous    | Relaxed      | Vehement       |
| Capable      | Fearful        | Left out     | Relieved     | Vital/vitality |
| Captivated   | Flustered      | Licentious   | Remorseful   | Vulnerable     |
| Challenged   | Foolish        | Lonely       | Restless     | Vivacious      |
| Charmed      | Frantic        | Longing      | Reverent     |                |
| Cheated      | Frustrated     | Loved        | Rewarded     | Wicked         |
| Cheerful     | Frightened     | Loving       | Righteous    | Wonderful      |
| Childish     | Free           | Low          |              | Weepy          |
| Clever       | Full           | Lustful      | Sad          | Worried        |
| Combative    | Fury           |              | Sated        |                |
| Competitive  |                | Mad          | Satisfied    | Zany           |
| Condemned    | Gay            | Maudlin      | Scared       |                |
| Confused     | Glad           | Mean         | Screwed up   |                |
| Conspicuous  | Gratified      | Melancholy   | Servile      |                |
| Contented    | Greedy         | Miserable    | Settled      |                |
| Contrite     | Grief stricken | Mystical     | Sexy         |                |
| Cruel        | Groovy         |              | Shocked      |                |
| Crushed      | Guilty         | Naughty      | Silly        |                |
| Culpable     | Gullible       | Nervous      | Skeptical    |                |
|              |                | Nice         | Sneaky       |                |
| Deceitful    | Happy          | Niggardly    | Solemn       |                |
| Defeated     | Hate           | Nutty        | Sorrowful    |                |
| Delighted    | Heavenly       |              | Spiteful     |                |
| Desirous     | Helpful        | Obnoxious    | Startled     |                |
| Despair      | Helpless       | Obsessed     | Stingy       |                |
| Destructive  | High           | Odd          | Stranded     |                |
| Determined   | Homesick       | Opposed      | Stuffed      |                |
| Different    | Honored        | Outraged     | Stupid       |                |
| Diffident    | Horrible       | Overwhelmed  | Stunned      |                |
|              |                |              | Stupefied    |                |

# Optional Phrases for Feeding Back

## **When you feel quite certain you know the emotion**

“You feel.....”  
“You sound....”  
“From your point of view...”  
“It seems to you....”  
“You’re...(sad, overjoyed)”  
“I’m picking up that you.....”  
“As you see it.....”  
“I hear you saying that....”  
“You think.....”  
“You believe....”  
“Where you’re coming from...”  
“You mean.....”

## **When you are tentative, less certain**

“Could it be that....?”  
“I think you’re saying...”  
“I wonder if....”  
“It seems to appear to you....”  
“I’m not sure if I’m with you, but....”  
“Perhaps you’re feeling...”  
“Correct me if I’m wrong, but...”  
“Is there any chance that you...?”  
“Is it possible that....”  
“Maybe you feel....”  
“Could this be what’s going on?”  
“I might have this wrong, but you seem...”  
“Let me see if I understand; you...”

# Correct Them...Don't Cripple Them

In previous articles, we have stressed how important it is to congratulate employees, listen to their concerns, help them solve problems, give them freedom and responsibility to make decisions and reward them properly. All of these are vitally important to maintaining a happy and productive crew. But, sometimes people must be corrected and reprimanded. It's in these situations that leaders must use great care in their choice of words, timing and overall approach to assure that they correct the problem without emotionally destroying the employee.

## Words can cut to the bone

Even in those situations when employees make unintended and uncharacteristic errors, leaders need to exercise some caution in the way in which they bring attention to errors. Employees who are "drawn and quartered" when they make mistakes learn very quickly to do two things:

- 1) Avoid situations that hold the risk of making errors
- 2) Learn to cover mistakes.

The mission of the leader is to encourage employees to be innovative, take a few calculated risks and not be at all afraid to quickly report errors. In that kind of environment, small errors get corrected before they become big problems for the business.

## Bad news is better than no news

Even more care must be taken in those situations where employees are knowingly doing wrong things. Often, in these situations, employees know what should be done and have decided that the rewards are greater for not doing the right things. In the extreme, this kind of attitude can result in major theft, substantial loss of profits to the business and serious damage to the image of the organization in the eyes of the consuming public.

To get some grasp on how serious the situation may be in your organization, ask yourself this question.

*"If I were one of my employees and had the choice of going to the boss to report an error or not telling, which decision would be less painful for me?" In other words, is it better to lie to you than tell you the truth?*

## An Ounce of Prevention

Most of us have learned the wisdom of taking steps to make our homes safe, healthy, and comfortable before accidents or misery can happen. We weatherproof before the snow starts flying; we set up our lines of defense before the bugs destroy our lawns.

The timeworn saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" applies nicely to relations between leaders and subordinates. Why wait until a situation has deteriorated so badly that an employee must be fired or the entire employee group has developed a poor attitude because of an ongoing problem? Why agree to a request by an employee when you really don't think it is in the best interest of the business?

In many cases, the key to preventing or correcting problems with employees is carefully but honestly talking about those things important to you. This is called assertive self-disclosure. It means knowing what you value, need and want and expressing those thoughts and feelings to your employees and others.

Assertiveness is an important skill for leaders. It's important because most of the things we want can and will be done by others when they understand what they are supposed to do, know why they are supposed to do it, know how well they are expected to get it done and that you appreciate what they are doing.

Talking about things important to you is obviously easiest when you believe your employees will accept your view of things. It becomes more difficult when you anticipate disagreement and/or resistance. In a sense, the more you tell employees what is important to you, the more you expose yourself. They begin to know what "makes you tick."



## Rewards outweigh risks

Although there are some risks, the potential benefits are overwhelming, both for you and for your relationship with your employees. These benefits include:

1. ***You'll feel better about yourself*** as a leader, and as a person, when you are open, honest and clear with people. You'll feel stronger, more responsible and confident.
2. ***Talking about things important to you gives others a more accurate picture of you.*** Your employees will know the important thoughts, feelings and values you wish for them to share. They are less likely to be confused, in the dark, and wondering where you stand on certain issues.
3. ***Openness on your part will invariably encourage your employees to be more honest with you.*** Honesty is a very contagious human characteristic.
4. ***Your employees can better meet your needs when they have a clear picture of what you want.*** The chances of having conflicts with people resulting from unknowns or needs not communicated are thus greatly reduced.

Expressing yourself clearly can reduce unwanted surprises, incomplete work and unnecessary errors on the part of your people.

There is no single, simple phrase or series of words to use to create this "open, honest communication" we're discussing. What you will say or do depends upon two major variables. Those are:

1. ***The strength and/or importance of the relationship you have with the person.*** You are more likely to be concerned about errors made by somebody important to you than someone who is not. You are more likely to be honest with the person you know quite well than someone you do not.

2. ***The seriousness of the problem.*** Many minor kinds of things happen in a typical work day. When something is a singular, one-time event, it can often be quickly forgotten. If it's an ongoing, repeating problem, it may not be so easily forgotten.

***When the person who has made an error is someone very close or important to us,*** our reaction to an error tends toward trying to make corrections. On the other hand, if you have a new employee or someone you have "emotionally written off" you're less likely to use heavy-duty correction skills. Instead the reaction may be one of "wait and see if it happens again."

As the problem becomes more serious, even with a person we're not particularly close to or care much about, we become more likely to take action to correct the problem.

Salespeople natively use common sense with new customers

If salespeople are calling on a new customer, (someone they don't know all that well, they unlikely to take serious correcting action on the first call. Suppose the customer agreed to meet at a certain time and showed up late. Although the situation may be irritating to salespeople, they are unlikely to say anything.

Maybe you're part of the problem

If the customer shows up late a second time, the most natural reaction of salespeople is to ***look for ways to change the situation by changing their actions.*** Salespeople are likely to think, "*Maybe the person is often busy at the time I've been trying to schedule an appointment, and perhaps I should try to schedule an appointment at a different time.*"

Try taking preventative action

After ignoring the problem once and searching for ways to change their own behavior when the problem repeats, when the customer is late a third time, salespeople are likely to ***try to prevent the problem.*** They may call ahead to make sure the customer will be available.

## It's okay to say what you want

The problem becomes more serious when the customer begins to ask for things salespeople suspect they should not do.

For example, the customer may promise to have key decision makers present for a major presentation. When the salesperson arrives, the customer says, "*The others couldn't make it. Go ahead and give me the information and pricing, and I will tell them about it.*"

The salespeople often realize that it is unwise to do this, and to keep the situation on track, will **declare what they would prefer** (have the other decision makers present to avoid confusion and to be sure the others get the information they need).

The entire situation takes on a new dimension when the customer begins to ask for things which salespeople simply should not do at all.

## Say "no" tactfully

Sometimes customers ask salespeople for "special favors." Salespeople who do not respond to these situations correctly discover themselves in a trap. If they give customers what they asks for, it's likely customers will ask again...or for more

Ultimately, a situation between any of your staff and customers becomes most serious when the customer (or an employee) is repeatedly, knowingly doing things which are irritating. It's at this point employees may be ready to say, "*I don't want to work with this jerk.*"

## When it's very serious, think first

It's at this level of problems that all staff members...and leaders...must exercise caution. At this level, people can become so mad that they say things that "win the battle but lose the war." Confronting someone is easily the most risky thing those who serve the public can do.

Speaking up to someone and correcting problems is risky. When leaders are weighing the possibilities of speaking to an employee, they sometimes find it difficult to do for a number of reasons.

1. **Calling a person into your office or finding a quiet place to talk about a problem can be extremely stressful for both parties.** We anticipate that emotions will escalate and don't know exactly what we might say if the situation doesn't go as hoped for.

2. Second, **there's always the possibility that speaking to the person will produce no result at all.**

As a leader, you may have been faced with situations where speaking openly and honestly to employees about things they are doing that's creating a problem may turn out to be a situation where they learn how to "get to you" and not change what they are doing.

3. **Bringing problems to an employee's attention often provokes anger.** Even though employees may know they are not doing the right thing, they sometimes defend their actions and lash back when spoken to. This reaction of anger can sometimes cause leaders to react with anger and very quickly a fairly

bad situation becomes terrible. The relationship may be wrecked.

In other words, there may be situations that should be corrected, but when the leader speaks about it the problem gets solved...but the relationship between the two is never the same again.

## 11 ways people try to avoid confrontation

Because confrontation carries risks, psychologists tell us there are some predictable ways in which people tend to respond to stressful situations... times when something should be said but we are afraid the outcome won't be good.

Most of these approaches are simply means to avoiding the problem rather than trying to get it solved. Look at the following descriptions and see if you find yourself using any of them:

## The Avoider

The avoider refuses to fight. When a conflict arises, this person will leave, pretend to be busy or do just about anything to avoid facing the problem. *The avoider refuses to face up to the seriousness of the problem by allowing things to stay the way they are or pretending there is nothing wrong at all.* Sometimes the avoider will go so far as to change the subject of the conversation when an employee comes to talk about a problem that the leader knows exists. This really drives employees nuts. Trying to solve problems with an avoider is like trying to box with a person who won't put on gloves.

## The Guilt Maker

Instead of saying straight out that they don't like or approve of something, guilt makers try to change others by making them feel responsible for causing pain. *Guilt makers' favorite line is, "It's OK. Don't worry about me..." This is often accompanied by a big sigh and sad looks.*

## The Mind Reader

Instead of allowing their employees to talk openly about problems, mind readers go into character analysis, explaining what the other person "really meant" or by saying, *"The problem with you is..." Mind readers then proceeds to tell what's wrong with the other person.* This is a neat way to avoid ever telling how you feel about the situation and at the same time it removes the opportunity for others to express themselves.

## The Trapper

Trapper plays an especially dirty trick on others by setting up a situation where something they want to happen starts to take place. When the other person "bites", the trapper begins to attack the person for doing the thing they designed. An example of this technique is when the trapper says, *"Let's be totally honest with each other," and then when the other person has been honest, he/she finds himself being attacked for saying things that the trapper doesn't like to hear.*

## The Crisis Tickler

These people never quite bring what's bothering them to the surface. They never quite come out and express themselves. *For example, instead of being honest and admitting a concern for declining profits, this person might innocently say, "Gee, How much did that thing cost?"* Although this drops a rather obvious hint, it never really goes after the true problem.

## The Gunny sacker

These people don't respond immediately when angry. Instead, they put their resentments into a "gunnysack." After awhile the bag begins to bulge with gripes. Then when the sack is about to burst, gunny sackers pours out all the pent-up aggression on the overwhelmed and unsuspecting victim... *"And not only that but four months ago on a Saturday morning you..."*

## The Joker

Because these people are often afraid to face conflicts head on, *they kid around with others who want to be serious.* After a while, *staff members begin to feel nothing can be talked about seriously.* They sometimes say, "He makes a joke about everything." Sometimes the jokes are light-hearted, but sometimes they cut to the bone.

## The Belt liner

Everyone has a psychological "beltline", and below it are subjects too sensitive to be talked about without hurting the relationship. For some people the beltline may have to do with physical characteristics, intelligence, past problems, or ingrained personality traits the other person is trying to overcome. *Sometimes when an employee has created a problem, belt liners get even by making a remark about the other person that hits below the belt, where it really hurts.*

## The Blamer

*Blamers are more interested in finding fault than in solving problems.* Needless to say, these people usually don't blame themselves. Blaming people almost never solves the problem and is generally a sure fire-way to others defensive. *When leaders blame people for errors,*

*employees sometimes respond by saying, "Well, perhaps I did, but just remember it was your idea..."*

### The Kitchen Sink Fighter

These people are so named because when discussing problems, *they often bring up things that are totally off the subject (everything but the kitchen sink)*. They may talk about how a person acted at the company Christmas party or that a person doesn't keep his work area tidy...or anything but the real problem. *Employees generally have great difficulty trying to figure out exactly what it was they did wrong...and can begin to wonder whether they ever did anything right.*

### The Benedict Arnold

This leader gets back at others by sabotage. *This can be done by not defending employees from others when they are being attacked verbally.* It can also be done by actually encouraging ridicule or disregard for staff members by others.

You've may have found yourself doing more than one of these diversion tactics. All of us have. The sad thing is that when we do these things, we actually know we are not solving the problem. Sometimes we even swear we'll never do it again, but we do. We do it simply because we don't know how to handle the truly delicate situation of telling someone else they've done something wrong without hurting their feelings.

### Set some objectives

Before looking at how to speak to employees (and others) about problems, it may be best to look at some objectives you should have when you're going to discuss a delicate situation with an employee...and the situation may be explosive.

One objective, perhaps the most important, is to get the problem solved. If you start into a discussion with an employee having *anything less than staying with it until you get the situation corrected, you might as well not bring the issue up at all.*

If you're willing to back down and allow the problem to continue...the employee comes up with a number of excuses or sad feelings...you'll probably end up frustrating both yourself and the employee. *In addition, the employee will quickly learn that you can be talked out of almost anything.*

### Focus on the problem

Another major objective--enter the discussion with a goal (whatever happens) that it would be your desire not to destroy the employee's self-esteem and pride.

There is no way to avoid a little bit of hurt or embarrassment when a situation is brought to an employee's attention. But, if the discussion is handled properly, the employee should be able to walk away agreeing that there was a problem, that you were fair, and they don't have to be ashamed of who they are.

### Keep 'em on the team

*A final major objective would be to do everything possible to maintain the relationship and improve it.* Hiring new people and training them to do a job for you is an expensive and time-consuming process. When a good employee can be helped by correcting some problems, it's a much more cost effective way to run the employee group.

Probably the best way to accomplish this objective is to *make sure the employee accepts responsible for solving the problem.* If you select a solution or order a change without giving the employee a reasonable opportunity to work with you to solve the problem, chances are pretty good employees will not have the commitment to follow through to assure that the situation gets corrected.

### Don't try to "go with the flow"

In most situations where you are going to speak to an employee about a serious problem, you have adequate time to think through the situation and decide a little bit in advance what you want to say. This is really important to assure meeting the objectives we just talked about.

If some minor problem occurs, and you have "a little talk with yourself" and decide it's not a big deal (as long

as it doesn't reoccur), you've reached the easiest and most practical of all solutions.

There may many things your employees do that might be irritating to you. Many of those things don't have any impact on the business. Employees are simply doing things that are different from the way you would do them.

Always ask yourself, "*What exactly is the impact on me, other employees or the business of the employee doing this thing?*" ***If the answer is virtually no impact...doing nothing is a fine solution. Congratulate yourself on not building a mountain out of a mole hill.***

When you see a problem behavior happen a second time or it's beginning to create problems, the next most likely reaction you'll have is seeing if there's something you can do to help solve the problem.

For example, employees are not answering the phone quickly enough when the store is extremely busy. There are a number of things you could do to help solve the problem. Perhaps you could assist with some of the sales activities. Perhaps you could assign a person to cover the phone during busy times.

In other words, if there is an administrative change which can be made to solve a problem (that seems to be growing), it just makes sense to make an attempt to solve the problem without criticizing employees for failing to do something it may be impossible for them to do under the current circumstances.

As the problem becomes more serious and continues to occur after you have first decided it wasn't a big issue...and after you've already discovered the problem is continuing...and you've tried to make administrative changes to solve it... it's now time to take action with employees.

### When it's time, use a plan

It is always best to say something before the problem occurs than waiting until it happens. If something has been an on-going problem, try to prevent it from re-occurring by talking with employees beforehand. Psychologists call this sending a "preventative

message." There are three key elements to sending a preventative message. Those are:

***Lead off by saying "I want....I need....It would be helpful to me."***

Tell employee (s) you want the thing done. For example, you might say, "**I would appreciate everybody being here and ready to go at 7:30 because the last two Saturdays we have had at least four customers here before 8:00 wanting to buy something.**"

Don't put an order or threat after the first two items--***I want...because.***

Remember the objectives for confronting people.

1. Get the problem solved.
2. Don't damage the other person's pride.
3. Try to accomplish everything in a way that makes the employees want to do what you want them to do through co-operation. Threatening them may produce the result but they'll often try to get even in some way.

### Don't offer solutions

If your employees have some excuse or reason that they think it may be difficult to do what you want them to do, they will quickly learn that it's their responsibility to speak up. When they do speak up, your response to them can make the difference on whether or not you get the result you're looking for.

Suppose, for example, you wanted someone in the office answering the phones no later than 7:30 in the morning. You say to the office staff, "*I really need someone to be here no later than 7:30 to start answering phone calls because the last four mornings at least six calls came in and I was the only person here to answer them and I didn't have access to the information they needed. I'd like to figure out a way to work this out. What do you people think will work for you?*"

Suppose further that there were only two employees in the office and one says, "*I have to drop my children at the babysitter's, and she doesn't like people showing up that early.*" Suppose the other said, "*The school bus*

*doesn't pick my kids up until a little before 8:00, and I don't want to leave them alone."*

I'm sure you can think of at least a dozen ways these two employees could work out their situations to take care of what you want done. ***If you suggest any of your ideas, you'll probably hear things like, "I can't do that because..."***

The best way to respond to these statements might be something like, *"So we have some difficult situations to work out here. What options can you think of that might work for you so that we can have at least one person here every morning by 7:30?"*

By responding in this way, the monkey is clearly on the shoulders of the employees. It will be their job to workout arrangements and ***because the solution came from them, they're more likely to make it work.***

If they propose it, it will generally work

This same method of responding works just as well for spur-of-the-moment problems that pop up. Suppose a mechanic knew that he was to get his area cleaned up and expensive tools put away before closing time. Let's also suppose that he seldom ever gets it done.

Let's continue to suppose that you've spoken to the employee about this problem using the methods we have described.

You might have said, *"I would really appreciate getting the area cleaned up and tools put away before closing time because we're losing an average of one hour each morning trying to find tools to get started on the day's work."*

Let's finally suppose the employee has agreed to start cleaning up 15 minutes before closing time.

Now comes the problem.

You're walking through the shop about five minutes before closing time and notice mechanics visiting with each other and the area has not been cleaned up and tools have not been put away.

One of the mechanics says, *"I don't think I'm going to be able to get things cleaned up on time tonight. Would it be alright if we've just left it this one time?"* All of your previous planning, preparation and discussion is suddenly being laid on the line.

You could say that it's okay to not clean up ***"this one time"*** but it's possible that of your encouragement to put tools away will go out the window in a matter of seconds.

You can come unglued and start into a long and loud sermon on how you're not going to put up with the situation anymore or you can try using the approach we've been talking about.

You could say, *"No, I would rather you didn't leave until the area is cleaned up and tools put away because I want to try the idea of having the shop ready to go every morning. The only way I can know if it is helping us get our work done more efficiently at lower cost is to see what happens when we do it."*

***Don't tell them what to do or offer any tips or suggestions on how to get it done.*** See what happens when you place responsibility for completing the task (as you want it done) on them.

Easily the most difficult situation you face when confronting employees is ***a situation where you have honestly tried everything else we've already talked about and the problem still isn't solved.*** As you'll remember, often when the problem has gone this far, you may be emotionally ready to pull the plug on the employee.

When it's down to the last choice

If that's the decision you've made, it may be best to do it rather than trying to confront the employee because rather than trying to fix something you may end up in a shouting match. If you want to try to fix the employee and solve the problem, think one more time about the objectives we've discussed.

1. Get the problem fixed
2. Don't cut the employee up and try to improve the value of the employee.
3. Keep the things you say down to three parts.

Those are:

1. An exact description (including frequency and quantity) of what the employee has done.
2. An exact description (including dollars, frequency or number of complaints) of what the employee's behavior did to you or the business.
3. An accurate statement of how you feel about the situation.

Let's look at these separately.

First, to save the employee's self-esteem your statement must ***focus on what the employee did and not who the employee is.***

When you say things like, "You're inconsiderate...sloppy... fouled-mouthed"...or other such things, you are attacking the employee.

When you say things like, "*There have been errors on each of your last orders amounting to more than a thousand dollar. Six times in the last week other mechanics have had to re-do jobs assigned to you. This morning when our customer, John Smith, must have done some things to irritate you, you questioned his parentage*" ***you're talking about facts and things rather than the employee.***

Very frequently when we start into a confrontation, we don't have our facts together. When you lead off a statement to an employee by saying that he/she - ***always*** does something or ***never*** does something or even say they ***frequently*** do something the employee is likely to disagree with you...you're going to get a legitimate reaction.

What does "***frequently***" mean? To you, doing something twice may be frequent. To the employee, doing something twice would be insignificant.

In second part, employees have to see that the action being discussed did in fact have some kind of negative impact. The order errors wiped out the entire profit of the store for a month. Having to rework jobs pulled mechanics off of other work and cost money as well as

creating dissatisfied customers whose jobs were not done on time.

Questioning customer Smith's parentage caused him to get mad and walk out of the store without buying the item he came for.

If you only tell employees what they did and cannot connect it to a negative consequence that happened for you or the business, they are likely to wonder why you're bringing the issue up in the first place...unless you are thought of by them as a nit-picker.

The final part of being open and honest with your employees is telling them how you feel about the situation. Does it worry you? Does it scare you? Does it confuse you?

Try not to talk about anger

It may make you mad, but often being mad is a feeling that comes from someplace else. For example, you may be sitting at an intersection, see the light change to green and start through the intersection. At about that time a car coming from the left or right may run a red light and nearly collide with you.

Your first emotional reaction may be anger. After you make it safely through the intersection, you'll discover that your real feeling was terror. Almost always, psychologists tell us, we get mad because of something else. We get mad because we're scared. We get mad because we're worried.

Anger is probably not correct

Think through how you truly feel about the situation and put the feelings in your message to your employee.

The importance of this part of confrontation is to ***help the employee gage how serious the problem is.*** If you stop by simply telling employees what they did and what the reaction was to the business, employees have no way of knowing whether that was a minor incident or a terribly important one.

***When selecting what you want to say about your feelings, try to be accurate. Don't say something bothers you a little bit if it's scaring you to death.*** By the same token don't say you're worried to death if

you're only a little confused. If you say you're a little confused (when your feelings are stronger), employees are likely to substantially underestimate how serious the problem is.

There is only one final point...once we've hammered throughout this look at confronting people... ***don't follow-up with a solution or a threat or an order.*** Stop after you've told the employee what was done, what happened and how you feel about it.

Employees will definitely have a reaction. You must listen to the reaction and give them a reasonable opportunity to defend themselves (if that's what they are going to do)

It may be necessary for you to again say that you want to solve the problem...after you've listened. Remember, ***the primary objective is to get the problem solved.***

Many times in confrontation you'll have greater success by leading off the entire message to the employee with the part about your feelings first.

This way employees have a strong idea why the conversation is being held and some idea of where he is going.

*You might say something like, "John, I called you in because I want to talk with you about something that has me worried. I've noticed for the last two weeks that you've come in to work more than 30 minutes late. You know we've talked about this and I've told you that there have been a number of times when your employees in the parts department didn't have the information they needed to solve customer problems. In the past you've agreed to be here on time.*

*For the last three mornings I've been watching what the employees do while they are waiting for you to show up. I've seen them turn away customers saying they don't know what the status on an order is and that they don't know when you'll be in.*

*In other words, John, the situation is costing us business. I want to negotiate something that will work for you, but I want you to know that before we leave this morning I want to solve the problem. John, what can you tell me?"*

It's clean, it's clear and it's fair. The monkey is on the employee's back, and you may have to listen to a dozen excuses...but hold off giving orders and threats and substitutes " I want...I need. . .because"...and make the employee solve the problem. Correct the problem, don't cripple the employee.



# Fair Ways to Discuss Problem Behaviors

Confrontation is always risky. Emotions almost always escalate. There is a potential for leaving a residue of hurt feelings because something was said, and it may not change anything...the other person may not care enough to change. However, one very important rule remains. If you say or do nothing to change a behavior that bothers you so much that it is having an impact on the relationship, the other person can, and often does, assume that what he or she is doing doesn't bother you.

*Fair confrontation means talking about behavior and not about nature of the person.* It is fair to say, "Three times today you have left things in the sink." It's unfair to say, "You obviously don't care about how hard I try to keep the kitchen clean."

## A word about anger...again

When another's behavior causes you a problem, your first feeling might be that of anger or hostility. Anger, however, is often the result of another underlying feeling. For example, if you are on the freeway and someone's driving nearly causes you to have an accident, you may react initially and instantly with anger ("*Watch out, you stupid idiot!*"), yet, a moment later you may become aware of the primary feeling that was operating, namely fear ("*That near-miss really scared me!*").

Since Confrontive I-Messages are planned, it is important to try to get in touch with your primary feelings and express those feelings congruently to the other person. If the first "feeling word" which pops into your head is anger, think about why you might be angry. Perhaps it's because you feel "used" or "confused" (don't have a clue about how to fix the problem).

Not only are the primary feelings more accurate, **avoiding saying the word "angry" will also avoid a possible defensive response by the other person.** Nearly everyone feels empathy toward another's fear, worry, or frustration...not so with anger, especially when directed at them.

Finally, avoid, at all costs, adding a fourth element to the equation...a solution. What you think the other person should do to correct the problem will produce the wrong reaction. You can't really change others, but you can give them enough information that they may see your point and decide to work with you to change. However, when a solution is added (*and what I want you to do is \_\_\_\_\_*), the other person almost always will react only to the solution and miss the others parts.

## You-messages don't work

While the idea of an I-Message may seem sensible, many of us fail to confront in this way. Rather we often communicate in **You-Messages**. Knowingly or unknowingly we talk about "you" or what "you did" and lose focus that the person with the problem is "I." You did something, but I am the one with the problem. I-Messages keep the problem in the correct zone.

You-Messages express judgments, guesses, evaluations, labels, and commands or threats. And since no one likes to be branded, put in a pigeon hole, or told what to do, You-Messages generally generate hurt feelings, defensiveness, and resistance in others. No staff member likes to have a finger pointed at her or him and be told, "*You really screwed up,*" "*You are inconsiderate,*" "*You evidently don't care how long you keep me waiting,*" "*You better get me that order placed or I can't promise delivery.*"

The four most common "You"-Messages:

**Put Downs** - These messages blame, criticize, scold or moralize. They are designed to punish and point out the problem you have like, "*Do you think it's right to take things from my office and never put them back?*" or "*After all I have done **for you**, I believe **you can do** this one thing for me."*

**Labeling** - Here the message directly evaluates, labels, or types the customer in a negative way. ("*You are inconsiderate of others.*" "*Your memory must be about five seconds long.*")

**Threats** - Subtly or blatantly, this message suggests some unpleasant consequence for the person confronted. ("*It's going to get pretty darned hard to find anyone who will loan you stuff if you don't learn to put things back when you borrow them.*"..." *Well, all I can say is that if you don't get the information by this afternoon, we'll have to turn this over to someone else.*")

**Orders** - Here, the confrontation message gives a direct order or strongly suggests how others should change, rather than letting them initiate change in their own way. ("*Please go get those specs now and put them in this morning's mail.*" "*Start putting things back where you found them.*")

You really can't change anyone.

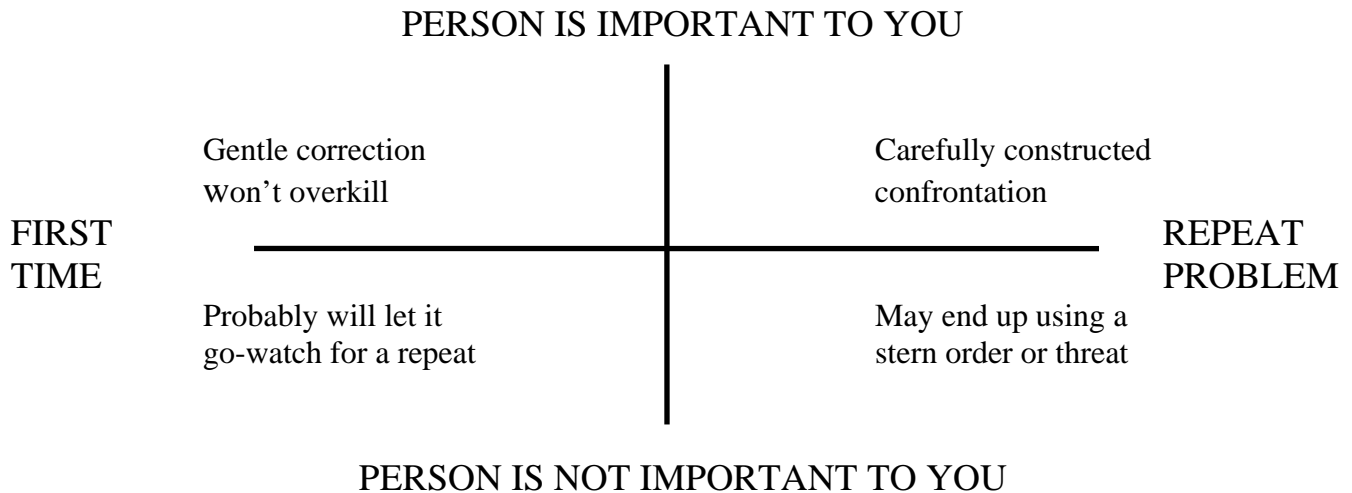
The Confrontive I-Message is a powerful influencer of change because it lets the person know in no uncertain terms how his or her behavior is hurting you. And, because this kind of confrontation does not order, direct, or threaten, others feel they have a choice as to how they will respond. Since you aren't demanding change, your message does not have to be resisted. Rather, a sense of responsibility is created in the other person, leading to a decision, in most cases, to help you out.

No One Likes to be Confronted

No one likes to be confronted, to be told that something they have done is causing a problem for someone else. Guilt, embarrassment, self-reproach, to some degree, overtakes all of us when we become aware of our shortcomings. At other times, we may **vehemently deny** any wrongdoing or feel perfectly justified in our actions.

One thing is 100% predictable: a person who is confronted will experience reaction. You-Messages, of course will produce a lot of this. But even a text-book perfect three-part I-Message will result in some degree of unpleasantness for the receiver of the message. Confronting is usually not enough.

# Reactions Are Based On How We Feel About The Other Person, And Whether It Is A New Or Old Problem.



## Rules for when you need to correct simple problem behaviors of others

Recognize that ***the other person will have an emotional reaction***. Plan to **say** what you think, **listen** to the emotion of the other, and (if necessary) **say again** what you want.

Remember the objective: ***Get the other person to do what you want through cooperation***. If it is likely you will command the other person to do what you want, it is probably best to go ahead with the order. Trying to negotiate will look (and be) phony.

Use this pattern:

**I think...BECAUSE**

**I want...BECAUSE**

**I would rather...BECAUSE**

## Situations Where “I want \_\_\_\_\_ because” Might Work

This is a *somewhat* unusual day. Virtually all of the leadership team is gone to something...you don't know exactly what. You have a gob of reports to get in the mail before the end of the day. A customer spots you and says, "*Got a minute. I'm wondering what you guys think of the new waste disposal regulations.*" What would you say?

A very good worker is historically late getting to work because she has to drop off her kids. Tomorrow is very important that she be on time because virtually everyone will be out of the office. What would you say?

A member of the board of directors wants you to go to lunch with him at his club. He's a nice person, and you've had lunch with him in the past. However, lunches have turned into two hour events and there has been a lot of pressure to have several drinks with him. What would you say?

## When the Problem Has Been On-Going or Is Serious

The objectives:

1. **Stay with it** to get the change you want.
2. **Don't damage** the other person's self-esteem.
3. **Maintain the relationship.**

Confrontive messages must include 3 (**and only 3**) parts.

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| The best description you can give of how you feel ( <i>without using the word "angry"</i> ) | The most precise description of what the other person did. | Information about what happened to you because of what the other did |
|---|--|--|

4. **DO NOT SAY WHAT YOU WANT THE OTHER TO DO!!** If you offer a solution, the only reaction will probably be to your proposed solution. They are likely to miss the most important elements of the message.

## These Require 3 Parts

You have a customer whose payment record has become soft in the last year. He's large enough to receive maximum discounts and some preferential treatment, but his payments have arrived more than six weeks late four of the last six months. Three times in the last six months you have scheduled appointments with him to discuss the matter. Once, he didn't show up at all, and the other times he was more than an hour late. On the most recent time, you didn't get to an important meeting because you waited. In spite of promises, his current invoice is past due.

|              |                            |               |
|--------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| YOUR FEELING | EXACTLY WHAT THE OTHER DID | IMPACT ON YOU |
|--------------|----------------------------|---------------|

You have a fellow employee who doesn't put things back when she borrows. At least nine or ten times in the last six months you spent 10-15 minutes looking through piles of things on her desk for something she either borrowed or failed to put where it is supposed to be. You're not a "neatness freak" but losing 1-2 hours is too expensive. You have talked with her about this twice already, but nothing seems to change.

|              |                            |               |
|--------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| YOUR FEELING | EXACTLY WHAT THE OTHER DID | IMPACT ON YOU |
|--------------|----------------------------|---------------|

The buyer for the county has called you three times in the past year to get quotes for equipment maintenance. In each case, he laid out scenarios rather complex services and ask if you will put together quotes for additional sometimes highly specialized work. You spent about an hour on each quote request...making calls and putting information together. So far, you have not received any business from them. Today a customer told you he heard that they are just using your quotes for comparison and already plan to use another dealer.

|              |                            |               |
|--------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| YOUR FEELING | EXACTLY WHAT THE OTHER DID | IMPACT ON YOU |
|--------------|----------------------------|---------------|

# Key Things Leaders Can Monitor To Help Sales People Get Off To A Strong Start

1. Help them establish reasonable priorities on call frequency and number of calls per day

The objective must be to broaden bases in "A" and "B" accounts  
(Invest time where there is true potential)

2. Teach them the value of simple accounts records

*Sales people who make notes immediately following sale calls sell 20% than those who rely on "remembering" client discussions*

## The Economics of Maximizing Territory Production

1. On average, it takes 5.5 contacts to get a customer to a place where he might seriously consider switching from one supplier to another or one product to another.
2. On average, sales people net...1:57...per day of face-to-face selling time.
3. Those sales people who make a high number of calls per day write 18% more orders...but, the orders they write are 16% lower in total revenue and 1.5% lower in profit
4. The most common place where sales people lose important time for account development is calling too frequently on low volume accounts.

## Hanging in Pays Off

47% make one solid selling attempt (could include several calls), are rejected and quit

22% try another time, again can't get interest developed and quit

8% try a third time

5% give it a fourth try

18% try 5 times or more...and write 75% of the switch business

# What's A Sales Call Worth?

EVERYBODY STARTS WITH

365 DAYS

|                                  |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Subtract weekend time            | _____ days |
| Subtract national holidays       | _____ days |
| Subtract vacation days           | _____ days |
| Subtract sales meetings          | _____ days |
| Subtract training programs       | _____ days |
| Subtract necessary "office time" | _____ days |
| Subtract "other" days            | _____ days |

TOTAL DAYS TO SUBTRACT \_\_\_\_\_

**NET DAYS/YEAR TO BE WITH CUSTOMERS** \_\_\_\_\_

ON SELLING DAYS, YOU START WITH 24 HOURS

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| Subtract sleeping time                   | _____ hours |
| Subtract personal hygiene time           | _____ hours |
| Subtract eating (not with customers)     | _____ hours |
| Subtract leisure (personal) time         | _____ hours |
| Subtract "paperwork/administrative" time | _____ hours |
| Subtract driving time                    | _____ hours |
| Subtract "other"                         | _____ hours |

TOTAL HOURS TO SUBTRACT \_\_\_\_\_

**NET HOURS PER SELLING DAY** \_\_\_\_\_

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Multiply # of days per year you have to sell | _____ |
| Times # of hours you can be with customers   | _____ |

**TOTAL HOURS PER YEAR TO SELL** \_\_\_\_\_

Divide your sales quota by number of hours per year you have. The value of one hour of selling time for you is: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ .



# Field Coaching Skills

One of the most valuable tools for helping salespeople improve selling skills is the *ride with* sales call. It is a sad fact that salespeople have a tendency (over a period of time) to quit doing the very things which made them successful. The observation of actual sales calls in progress followed by skillfully handled feedback can dramatically improve salespeople's abilities to make good decisions when they are again alone in their territories.

Outside salespeople spend 75% or more of a "typical day" alone. The problem: the talks they have with themselves tend to be more negative than positive, "*I can't sell this guy*"... "*The competitor is killing us with price.*"

On average, salespeople net one hour fifty-seven minutes per day face-to-face with customers. In this small zone, performance must be on target. However, in the heat of the battle, it is virtually impossible for salespeople to simultaneously perform and also objectively analyzing their own actions. That is, of course, the important contribution a skilled coach can make.

## **COMMON SNAGS IN MAKING EFFECTIVE COACHING CALLS**

### Biases based upon previous experiences

Over a period of time, coaches come to conclusions about the abilities of various salespeople to make effective presentations. Observations are colored by these previous conclusions, good and bad, and coaches may not be as objective as they should be.

### Observing out-of-context

Only infrequently do coaches join salespeople for repeat calls on the same customer. They usually do not have the history of previous calls on customers nor do they always have a good understanding of the relationship between customer and salesperson. Consequently, it may appear to the coach that the salesperson is deliberately disregarding good selling principles. In reality, prior call history and *ground rules* established between the customer and salesperson may make a salesperson's seemingly improper direction the sensible approach.

### Nit-picking--do it "my way"

The coach's focus on correcting relatively unimportant behaviors of salespeople frequently over-shadows proper attention on truly important behaviors. For example, some coaches can become obsessed with the rate of speech (too fast/too slow) of salespeople or their use or non-use of specific tools. *Coaches who insist that everything be done their way may compromise the productivity of salespeople.* If what sales people are doing works in the broad sense and is not illegal, immoral or socially unacceptable, the coach's insistence on a change may be a values collision rather than a skill deficiency.

### Focus on "how it was done" rather than results.

Letter perfect presentations that sound mechanical and lack vitality usually stand less chance of success than presentations which may be a bit disjointed but attend to customers' needs and are done persuasively and with conviction.

## Concentration on weakness.

The old curbstone conference rule of *two pats for every kick* should be viewed as a minimum for positive reinforcement. *Coaches who constantly emphasize weaknesses rapidly lose the attention and respect of their salespeople.*

## Heavy handed criticism

Coaches who are insensitive to the way they deliver criticism also risk damaging the self-image salespeople of themselves and creating a reduced desire to learn. Often what is said is less objectionable than how it is said.

## No feedback TO the coach

Coaches, unless they seek it, seldom get verbal feedback on their coaching practices. Coaches should ask for feedback and use it to improve their own listening skills. This can go a long way toward preempting negative reactions to critiques.

## **PREPARATION PAYS BIG DIVIDENDS**

Decide in advance the kinds of customers who will be seen--particularly if you wish to observe the presentation of a certain product or program. Why waste the limited time you have to be with salespeople on sales calls to prevent you from focusing on important issues?

Review the account records for each customer chosen. Use the records to develop a reasonable plan for the calls. This step, in itself, may be eye opening. Many sales people have few, if any, written records of what was said or learned on various sales calls. Yet, *those who have simple records sell 20% more than those who don't.*

Decide how you will be introduced. Because your title may contain the word "manager," it may cause customers to be more interested in what you have to say than your salesperson.

Closely associated is: decide in advance what will be said to explain why you're presence. Without explanation, customers can easily presume you are observing the salesperson because of deficiencies or are along to dig out additional information about customers' operations. A brief statement clears it up.

Nail down exactly the role you will play in the sales call. If you are to make the entire presentation with the salesperson observing, fine. If you are to remain completely quiet throughout the presentation, fine. Just decide ahead and stick to the plan.

Likewise, make sure salespeople know the role they are to assume. Who is to say the words of introduction? Is the salesperson to quote price and terms? As much as you can, avoid the awkward things that happen when an extra person is present who can offer information to customers.

It is also important to define the circumstances in which you might intervene in sales interviews. *Normally there are only two:*

- 1. The salesperson says something so incorrect it would leave the customer with a dangerously wrong impression of your product or service*
- 2. The probability of a large sale is high, the salesperson is losing it, and there will be virtually no way to salvage the sale later.*

Know before you start what you want to observe. You may not be looking for deficiencies. You could be learning how top producers do their magic so you can teach others. You could be joining a salesperson just because the two of you seldom have time together.

Whatever the reason, decide...and inform the sale person. This removes nagging fears that might crop up--particularly if your visits to the field are infrequent.

## THE FIVE STEPS OF COACHING

### Step 1. If the salesperson is learning, demonstrate.

It is important for learners to see skills, processes, or tasks that they are learning, performed by someone else. During demonstrations, learners can observe processes and concentrate on those areas they don't understand or lack skill.

It is **not** critical that demonstration calls reach a successful conclusion. For a new coach, this is difficult to believe, but it's true. It's important to give learners is a chance to observe the unpredictability of selling situations.

If the demonstration is unsuccessful (the buyer does not buy), the coach and salesperson can verbally go over the interview and try to determine at what point the sale was lost and why. Many times this emphasizes the importance of a particular step in the selling process better than if everything had flowed smoothly.

#### The coach should:

- Establish an objective for the call
- Spell out the plan and give reasons for the strategy
- Execute the call with the sales person observing

After the call, the coach and salesperson should go through the feedback process described later in Step 5.

### Step 2: Teach salespeople how to prepare

A Roman philosopher, Seneca said, "*Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.*"

In this step, the next call is picked and the coach gives the salesperson the assignment to:

- a. Establish an objective

- b. Develop a plan and reasons why the plan should work.

Don't rush this step. Allow the time necessary to properly prepare. Obviously, depending on the product or service, this might take a few minutes or a few days, but don't ever omit it. The learner should put in writing--outline form is okay--both the objective and plan.

### Step 3: Review

The next step is for the coach to review the objective(s) and plan the sales call--or the intended approach to developing a certain selling skill. This is an excellent place for the coach to liberally use the word, "**Why?**"

Sometimes it is helpful for learners verbalize the presentation beforehand. If there are important omissions or approaches which may be ineffective, the coach should ask what the outcome of the planned approach might be. The outcome of sales calls is seldom known with absolute certainty, but the experience of the coach in planning can significantly reduce bad outcomes for learners.

If concerns exist about the learner's ability to perform, role playing with the coach can help. The coach should take the role of the buyer. There are two reasons for this. First, if the coach is taking the role of seller, learners can be further intimidated by the skills of "the pro." Second, learners seldom have enough knowledge of what customers say to effectively play the role of buyer.

Such discussions and role playing should never be used to assure that learners do things the coach's way. Instead, it is to instill in learners some confidence in their ability to do the job.

#### Step 4: Observation

The purpose of coaching is to improve the skills of salespeople; therefore, the coach must observe the skill in action. Coaches must first ascertain that the learner has an adequate mental understanding of the skill being developed.

When learners have had opportunities to watch demonstration calls; and have already done parts of some sales calls--with the coach doing other parts--it is time for the learner to try an entire call without assistance.

When observing learners' first "solo" calls, **do not become involved**. It is critical that learners understand in advance that the coach will not step in or take any part of the call. Previously, we mentioned two potential exceptions: (1) a serious misrepresentation of the product or service by the learner; (2) a very lucrative, high probability sale is being lost and is likely to be irretrievable.

Both these potential pitfalls can be avoided with good planning. Proper preparation, including discussion and role playing, should assure that learners know their products or services or, at least, knows where to find correct information in sales literature.

Avoiding stepping into a large sale which might be lost is even easier.

***Make sure the first "solo" call is on a customer or prospect whose potential purchase is so small it doesn't really make any difference whether the sale is made or not. The wrong message is being sent if learners think the only satisfactory outcome of a sale interview is a closed sale.***

This is especially true of learning calls. Sales people must learn early that losing sales is part of the job. The primary objective for the coach on these early learning calls is to help salespeople figure out why things went the way they did--and determine what corrections to make.

If the coach steps in, the situation changes...*the opportunity for salespeople to learn evaporates if "the old master shows how a pro does it."*

Rescuing is okay for demonstration calls, not okay for first "solo" calls.

#### Step 5: Get Feedback

The operative word is **GET**, not **give**. In coaching, learners must tell what they observed about their own performances. They must gain insights. Then (and only then) do they learn at the *skill* level.

Therefore, *the role of the coach is to ask questions that help salespeople analyze what actually occurred in sales calls*. Learners must see their actions objectively and recall the results of those actions. When they see what they are doing, they understand and are motivated to change behavior accordingly.

This is why *coaches must never tell sales people, "This is what you were doing wrong."*

A better approach is use these three guide questions to help salespeople think about their performances:

- 1. What did you do in the call that "felt good" or seemed to be going well?***
- 2. What modifications to your objective and plan did you deliberately make?***
- 3. What is your strategy from here? What do you want to do on the next call on this customer--based on the outcome of this call?***

If you have already been a coach, you're probably wondering, "*Where is 'what do you think you could have done differently?'*"

We omitted it because we think it's a waste of time. It generally only produces protect and defend replies or self-deprecation.

The primary purpose of coaching is to teach two skills: (1) the ability to accurately review what happened, and (2) the insight to plan for the next step in sales process.

What happened...happened! What might have, could have, should have happened is absolutely irrelevant.

The three guide questions above are thought starters, but it takes lots of "WHY?" questions to assure learners dig deep enough to learn.

Why did it seem the plan would work?

Why did that technique feel right or good?

Why was that modification of the plan made?

Why do you believe the buyer reacted the way he did?

Why was a particular strategy used?

This is an instructional approach known as a Socratic dialog--questions followed by other questions that cause learners to think more deeply about issues.

Using the three discussion starting questions, followed by "WHY?" questions, coaches help learners analyze their actions in selling situations. This level of learning must take place before anything else positive can happen in the coaching process.

After learners have considered (from their point of view) the answers to the questions, coaches can zero in on areas where learners did not understand what to do or didn't pick up customers' reactions.

## Summary

Selling is nothing more than an applied behavioral science. There is nothing coaches can teach that salespeople couldn't figure out themselves--given enough time. The purpose of coaching is to speed up the learning process.

People change and learn slowly. They consciously or subconsciously keep track of things that work and don't work. They compare things they are told will work with prior experiences. Coaching is a positive intervention in the trial and error process. Therefore, doing the five steps only once probably will not result in significantly improved professional execution by learners.

Good coaching is a way of life for top producing sales teams. When the techniques involved in executing the five steps become an integral part of sales coaches' own personal skills, they become *multipliers of people*.

## HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR COACHING SKILLS

To become a great coach, *learn how to get feedback from salespeople* so they develop the skill to analyze their own performances.

*The time salespeople spend with a great coach should help them learn how to make minor corrections day by day* on the hundreds of sales calls when the coach isn't there to ask the important questions or provide observations.

*The key, then, is for coaches to learn to ask rather than tell. It is tough to develop this skill.* Coaches often were top producing sales people at one time and were selected for their current position because they could outsell others.

The urge, even with good intentions, to tell learners how to do better is almost uncontrollable.

Salespeople often know what to do at the cognitive level. Therefore, if they are merely told how to do something correctly, it only confirms what they already know.

Merely telling generally won't help them accept that *the results of their actions are not always consistent with their knowledge*.

The purpose of coaching is not so much to dissect a sales call as to help salespeople learn how to evaluate what they are doing. When they can "see" their actions and the results of those actions, they have a most important skill...the ability to determine what works, what doesn't and how make necessary corrections.

## WHAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN YOU "TELL"

*Regardless of how objective and constructive one tries to be, CRITICISM IS CRITICISM.*

When coaches say, "This is what you are doing wrong," the natural tendency is for salespeople to protect and defend.

They protect by rationalizing their action or looking for excuses like, "Well, that customer is different. I tried that with this guy before and...."

They sometimes defend by arguing that the approach was right, "Selling is a matter of timing. I was going to do that later", etc.

When this happens, the learner is no longer looking objectively at the situation.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ASK

By using questions, coaches are requiring (not forcing) learners to go back and see in their mind's eye what happened. When learners put their own words to what happened, they start to learn at the skill level.

When this begins, ask additional questions to help learners analyze **WHY** what they did resulted in the actions of the buyer (i.e., *not understanding the buyer's statements or taking an inflexible position*).

Words from salespeople that indicate real learning is taking place are things like, "Now I see."

## HOW TO USE THE QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE

### Right after the selling interview

Questions in this setting are to find out:

- a. The feeling or attitude of the sales person about the call
- b. If there is something on the mind of the salesperson that is important to discuss

Good questions to use here are ones like:

*How do you feel about that call?*

*How do you think it went?*

If salespeople attempt, perhaps unintentionally, to hook you into a "tell" rather than "ask" mode by saying, "So, how did I do?" your reaction might be:

*"Let's talk about it and see. I'm interested in your opinion. How do you feel it went?"*

**Don't tell.** Put the analysis back into their laps and minds.

Their initial thoughts about the call will be one of the following:

**Positive**--they think all went right, *but your observation is all did not go well*

**Negative**--something went wrong, but they say the *root cause that things went badly was out of their control* (*competition, lack of support from the company, two-faced buyer, etc.*)

**Creative, objective analysis**--the sales people can be positive or negative, but have solid reasons for their beliefs

If the initial observation by the salesperson is either of the first two, don't react too quickly. When learners feel good and shouldn't or if feelings are negative with blame for the outcome placed on others, reacting too quickly may shut down deeper thinking.

This is especially true when feelings are negative. The coach's quick reaction will most likely start *protect and defend* reactions.

Allow them to feel anything they wish...initially. After positions have been verbalized, start toward deeper understanding by getting learners to analyze what happened and why...with **WHY** questions.

## Move from comparison of the objective or plan with the outcome to thinking about a strategy for the next call

Because these parts of the sales call are more logistical in nature, the questions can be more direct:

*“Tell me again about the objective you had for this call.”*

*“As you look back to your plan and how you thought things might go, where did you make changes?”*

*“What do you think should be the next step with this customer?”*

Backup questions like *“What happened when...”* cause learners to go back in their minds and recall their actions and the resulting reaction of the buyer. Hopefully this will lead to some insights.

## Keeping “why” questions interesting to the learner

If you ask, *“Why did you do that?”* chances are learners will feel they must defend. *“I did it because...”* Hence, no learning.

Phrasing WHY questions so the learner is invited to analyze rather than defend can be done this way:

*“Why do you think the buyer said that?”*

*“Why do you suppose the buyer was so negative about...?”*

*“Why do you think the buyer was so interested in...?”*

The use of WHY in these examples is more likely to cause salespeople to analyze because the focus is on the buyer rather than the salesperson.

Nothing...including good coaching skills...works all the time

There will be difficult circumstances when learners reject that your knowledge is greater than their, and therefore, reject your right to ask them questions. In such cases, keep the feedback simple and honest.

It is a fact that, regardless of how talented the coach was as a salesperson, he or she may be supervising a superstar...a person who on his worst day is better than the coach on his best.

Your “ride with” calls on these salespeople, may to be learn. WHY questions to them are to gather information rather than foster self-analysis.

If asked, tell what you observed. Don't add your evaluation or editorialize; simply state what you saw. If the salesperson asks you whether his/her action was right or wrong, ask what the outcome was. Don't evaluate.

If this alternative is used, listen and watch closely for defensive or protective behavior on the part of salespeople. If they become overly defensive about your comments or questions, drop the subject.

Learners can only learn if they want to. When strong emotions are blocking the salesperson's desire to think and discuss, give coaching a rest.

Another circumstance requiring special handling is one in which salespeople are reacting far too defensively to your observations. Virtually any statement you make is being interpreted as negative feedback. In these cases, work to downplay the importance of your thoughts while getting them to think beyond emotions. Most salespeople appreciate a comment like:

*“As I have said, it actually doesn't make a lot of difference what I think. It's what you see and learn for yourself that's important. Let's look at it from what happened rather than why. What do you remember happening when you said...?”*

The purpose of coaching is to get learners to tell you what happened, what resulted and why they should change approaches or develop different strategies--if change is needed.

To do this, coaches must act as mirrors for learners by asking questions so learners can see their actions and the consequences. The old bromide, "*See is believing*" applies to coaching.

When learners "see" what they are doing, they are more likely to devote time and energy to trying, practicing other approaches.



# Field Coaching Report

DATE

NAME

1. EXTENT TO WHICH CALL OBJECTIVE/PLAN WAS MET

---

---

2. THINGS DONE WELL/SKILLS USED EFFECTIVELY

---

---

3. SALESPERSON'S IDEAS ABOUT STRATEGY FOR NEXT CALL ON THIS CUSTOMER, FOLLOW-UP, OR STRATEGY FOR A SIMILAR SITUATION

---

---

4. IF SALESPERSON WAS TO DEMONSTRATE A SPECIFIC SKILL OR PRESENT A PARTICULAR TOPIC, DESCRIBE THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT WAS ACCOMPLISHED

---

---

5. WERE THERE ANY SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES SUGGESTED \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

# Notes

# Notes

# Biographical Sketch--Bill Sharp



Bill Sharp is one of the most respected training consultants in our industry and the only sales trainer ever to be simultaneously endorsed by both the National Lumber and Building Material Dealers Association and the North American Building Material Distributors Association

Bill also travels coast to coast teaching a selling skills program for builders and remodelers...sponsored for them by their suppliers. He has twice been a featured speaker at the NAHB International Show.

Since becoming a training consultant more than 30 years ago, he has spoken at hundreds of conventions and personally conducted seminars in which more than 900,000 front line sales people learned how to better serve their customers.

In 1984, his Selling Skills and Customer Relations video taped training program became the standard for teaching retail salespeople how to provide excellent service to their customers.

His workshops for managers have won the praise major manufacturers, distributors and dealer associations because his programs are known for their fast pace, humor and easy to remember skills rather than psychological mumbo-jumbo and theory. Participants consistently say, "*He knows me and my customers. He talks about real situations exactly like I see every day.*"

Bill was formerly a salesman, manager and sales trainer for three Fortune 500 companies. He has been on the adjunct faculty of the University of Missouri, Park University and William Jewell College. He has also been a guest lecturer at several others.

Now Bill is using his accumulated knowledge of the retail lumber industry to provide on-site consultation with owners and managers about how to increase both revenue and profit.

Bill and his partners call themselves The PerCon Group (**PER**formance **CON**cepts for Management Excellence). They regularly conduct selling skills and sales management programs across the US and Canada, and sometimes in Western Europe and the Far East.



**Bill Sharp**  
**The PerCon Group**  
**800-469-1393**  
**billsharp@kc.rr.com**