

A white paper on making managers and supervisors more effective in our busy stressful environment

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Abstract:

The work environment is becoming more and more demanding and middle managers and supervisors are increasingly caught in the middle of demands from senior management and their own teams. This paper identifies some management techniques they can use and also outlines an approach to act as a safety valve and enable them to feel supported and valued.

Introduction

With ever increasing workloads and increasing pressures from both senior management and from their staff, middle managers and supervisors are increasingly getting caught in the middle. They end up being increasingly frustrated and feeling pressurised from all directions.

They no longer enjoy their time at work and they start looking for actions they can take to improve things. For example: they put up the barriers around their departments in an attempt to reduce the workload (and they are then seen as being uncooperative) or they start working all hours, their performance and the performance of their team goes down, perhaps their health suffers or they start looking for another job.

“Surely life is too short to spend 35+hrs a week somewhere we don’t want to be!”

“There must be more to our working lives than this!”

These are common refrains and with the pressures on our work/life balance increasing they are becoming more and more relevant to our everyday lives. The idea of a job for life is no longer relevant, there appears to be little loyalty from many companies to their employees as they “downsize” and “outsource” work to other countries.

There is a new generation of workers who want to get more out of life and work, the younger generation are now leaving schools and colleges with the desire to get something more from their working lives, they want to be fulfilled and enjoy their time at work.

Coupled with the desire for people to get more out of their life, the business world is becoming increasingly competitive, customers are expecting more and more and competition is forever increasing from overseas. In recent years new technology has changed the face of how we do business.

All these pressures dictate that a new way of managing people is needed. Businesses need to provide a management style that enables people to enjoy coming to work. Without motivated and competent employees we will never be able to offer the best solutions to the market. Without doubt a positive attitude is needed to serve customers effectively and make the experience a good one for the customer that will encourage them to come back

At its simplest most businesses are based about making people happy, generally this is the customer. A simple question: “Is it easier to make someone happy if we are happy ourselves?” The answer surely is a resounding “Yes”.

When enthusiasm grows in a business culture people put more of themselves into what they do and are able to deliver a better result. Generally work is seen as life without fun, without friends and without family. It does not have to be this way. If, as managers, we look after the employees and we look after the customers we can develop an enthusiastic well motivated workforce that really cares and makes a difference.

Making our busy managers and supervisors more effective

Obviously busy people need to adopt good time and workload practices but this is not what this paper is about. What is also needed are some management techniques that can be applied by the managers and supervisors.

Management techniques:

In a nutshell we advocate what is needed is a practical approach that can actually be implemented by all managers. The key areas to concentrate on are:

- Managers and supervisors must adopt a positive attitude and accept cabinet responsibility.
 - The importance of a positive attitude cannot be overstated; if leaders of teams are at all negative about the tasks ahead of them then it is very difficult for those teams to be positive and enthusiastic about completing the tasks.
 - Accepting cabinet responsibility is also important – if managers come out of meetings moaning about decisions then this creates a negative environment.
 - Attitude is a choice and people can choose if they want to be positive or negative about tasks. Do you reward your people for being positive? Or is your attitude and behaviour a negative role model?

- Managers and supervisors need to build rapport and empathy with their staff.
 - If you want to build a good supportive team you must empathise with the individuals. This is particularly important in busy times when people need to feel supported and yet it is one of the first things that gets shelved by busy managers.

- People should be praised and recognised for doing the everyday things right.
 - When busy one of the reasons people begin to feel overwhelmed or demoralised is because they do not feel that their efforts are appreciated and they begin to feel that they are being taken for granted and perhaps taken advantage of.
 - The manager or supervisors role is often to correct problems and issues and they are forever looking for and finding things that have gone wrong. Sometimes they forget to spot the normal everyday things that are being done right.
 - Tremendous self esteem can be given to their people if the managers individually praise people for doing the right thing. This can be as little as just saying “well done” or “thank you”.
 - Praising people appropriately is an easy thing to do, it can have a real impact on morale and yet many managers find it difficult. If they are not used to doing it they will have to make a conscious effort to spot the little things going right and comment on them.

- Successes and achievements of the team or company must be celebrated.
 - How do you celebrate team or company success? Most people want to be part of a successful team and celebrating successes starts to build pride in the team.
 - When a team is working with large backlogs of work if you recognise a successful performance and celebrate it, it acts as a reward and a motivator. If you do not celebrate, all that working hard means is, “we can start earlier on the next piece of work”. This does not motivate people to give that little bit more.

- Managers must tackle issues of poor performance and provide effective coaching.
 - Issues of poor performance must be addressed. If they are not resolved it causes bad feeling and resentment amongst the other members of the team.
 - Managers need to accept that their personal performance is dependant on their teams performance – it is the managers role to effectively develop and motivate his team.

Supporting the managers and supervisors

The role of the leader is often a lonely and thankless task. At times it can be hard to maintain the enthusiasm, maintain the perspective and manage, motivate and cajole the team.

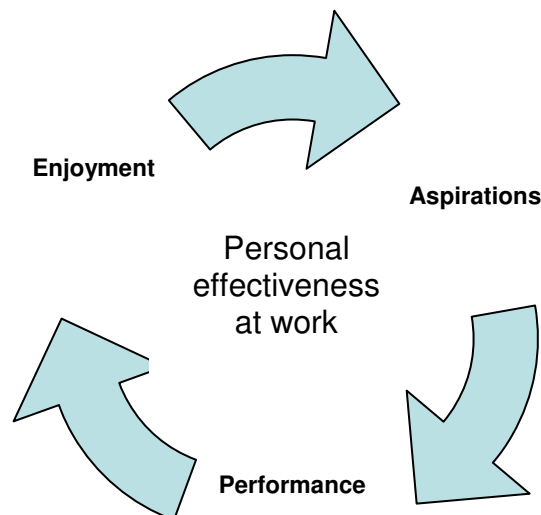
No high performance athlete would dream of making gold without a coach – is it any different for business managers and team leaders wanting to achieve their goal?

In a busy and stressful environment providing managers and supervisors with a coach can be effective at improving their personal skills and their ability to cope successfully with the stresses and demands imposed on them. On top of this it is a tangible demonstration that they are being supported and that they themselves are valued by the organisation.

The coach needs to be someone who is independent of the business, family and friends, someone who you can trust and someone who will listen to you with one agenda - guiding you through the demands.

There are many personal coaching models but the focus of our coaching is on improving effectiveness at work and we use the following model/framework:

Fig 1. Personal effectiveness Coaching model



Our coaching model is based on three interrelated components that impact an individual's ability to achieve their potential at work and become as personally effective as they can.

Aspirations

What do individuals want to achieve in life for themselves and for their "significant others"? This can then be related to what that means to their career and the organisation that they work for. Sometimes people need to make compromises in their aspirations at work to accommodate the wishes of their "significant others" and sometimes it is the "significant others" who have to make the compromise – but there needs to be a common understanding. Some people like to have specific goals and aspirations and others like to have much looser goals – we are not proscriptive but it is important that there are some aspirations defined however loose they may be. These aspirations can then be used by individuals to improve and develop to their potential

Enjoyment

To what extent are individuals enjoying their time at work and what are the factors that they do not enjoy? There is a need to explore these areas and see if changes in aspirations or skills can improve the enjoyment. At Inom our belief is that if enjoyment suffers it can lead to motivation and performance problems at work. This can then adversely impact personal life. Our coaching is based on the premise that people who enjoy their time at work are much more committed and deliver more for the organisation. Many individuals can enjoy the work environment more if they become personally more influential in their workplace; this is because they feel they have more control over what is happening to them. Our coaching looks at how people can enjoy work more and get a greater sense of personal achievement.

Performance

What personal skills do individuals want, and need to improve, in order to achieve their aspirations and enjoy work more? For example this might relate to a specific managerial ability or perhaps presenting oneself more effectively. There could be difficulties and confrontations with certain individuals at work and coaching can really improve these relationships. Performance coaching is about providing soft skills to help individuals be more effective in the workplace.

Some outcomes people should expect from coaching:

- Greater clarity about personal vision and how this can be interwoven with their professional role and organisation.
- Identification and testing of ideas in a safe and agenda free environment.
- Improved personal skills in managing teams and people.

- Improved personal influence and confidence.
- Greater understanding and commitment to personal career decisions.
- A greater sense of achievement and control.
- Increased personal effectiveness and enjoyment at work.

Conclusion

The work environment is becoming more and more demanding and middle managers and supervisors are increasingly caught in the middle of demands from senior management and their own teams. In order to increase their effectiveness it is necessary to manage their teams in a way that builds enthusiasm and commitment and addresses issues of performance. It is also increasingly of value to provide the managers and supervisors with personal coaching specifically aimed at increasing their own personal effectiveness. In a busy and stressful environment this can act as a safety valve and enable them to feel supported and valued.