

# PERSONNEL NOTEBOOK

For Your Most Important Resource—The Human Resource

By:

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## BAD MANAGEMENT

### Is It Better Than No Management At All?

In a presentation entitled, "Self Organizing Systems," speaker Margaret S. Wheatley, Ph.D., stated her belief that "management just happens." Her concept was well established. She said that if you throw any group of people (and most species of animals) together, they will automatically, by nature assemble themselves into some order and begin determining their purpose and direction. Management!

Given the freedom and enough time, they will round out the rough edges and make a credible and reasonably effective organization.

Now, given that you have the power to select the managers, determine the goals, and create the policies, you should be able to establish the quality of your management over a random process, right? Well, not everyone! Here at our company, HRA, we are constantly impressed with the management process we see in organizations across the country. Truly brilliant, creative, quality conscious, ethical and productive management that prevails in most organizations. But at the same time we are often amazed at the really bad management we see, hear and read about. While we want to know more about and concentrate on the good management examples, we may also have much to gain by knowing about the bad.

#### What is Bad Management?

The definition must arise out of considering first what is "good" management?

A simple and direct description could be:

*Good management is the successful production of results or conditions usually through the leadership of other people, in the most efficient,*

*ethical and productive manner with the least negative side effects.*

So, bad management has to start with the opposite:

*Failure to produce those results or conditions, lack of leadership, inefficiency or non ethical methods and/or too many negative side effects.*

#### On the job examples you may recognize:

- Failure to select the right people.
  - Not knowing what you need or how to detect it or how to interview for it.
  - Selecting people based on how well you relate to their personality, their chemistry, not their qualifications.
- Lacking basic management skills or knowledge.
  - Basic organizing, setting goals, identifying steps, delegating the work, monitoring the process, coaching and giving feedback. Identifying when the job is done.
- Doing "busy-ness" instead of being productive.
  - A recent study showed that super busy people often spend most of their time doing repetitive, non-priority things. Meetings, phone calls, routines, failing to spend time on the priority item(s). Not "keeping their eyes on the prize!"
  - An example, Often a good secretary or administrative assistant can accomplish more by a well placed phone call to the right person, with the right question and attitude than can the manager accomplish all day.

- Failure to communicate.
  - No feedback on job performance or on things affecting employees.
- Assuming that they (the manager) are the brains and the employee is the doer.
  - Some managers think that the employee's job is to make the manager look good.
- Being afraid to manage.
  - Letting employees manage the manager.
  - Afraid to be critical, to correct.
  - Failing to stop wrong things or to promote right things.
  - Afraid of hurting the employee's feelings.
- Wanting to be the "friend" who is liked instead of the manager in charge.
- No plan to succeed.
  - If you don't know where you're going, then it doesn't make any difference which way you go.
- No measurement of performance.
  - Who is producing what you need and who is not.
  - Not informing employees of how well or how poorly they are doing as it applies to their responsibilities and/or goals.
- Lack of management.
  - A laissez-faire approach that just let's everyone "keep on keeping on" without any input, controls, or monitoring from management.
- Judging and managing the good 95% of the employees by the actions of the worst 5%.
  - Creating stringent autocratic policies based on the worst employees and applying them to all employees.
- Being unfair.
  - Employees sense unfairness deeply and keenly.
- Being unethical.
  - You will ultimately lose most of the respect you get, once employees see you as unethical. If they learn to cheat from you, they will eventually cheat you.
- Using your position to foster your personal gain.
  - Employees will eventually know if you are using company time and resources for personal gain. You will lose their respect and potentially get into legal problems.
- Using your position to further your political or social views.
  - Your advocacy of political causes, your views of victimhood, entitlements or prejudices have no place in your management. Employees are entitled to their own views as long as they don't affect job performance. This can also lead you into court.
- Rewarding non-producers that you like while neglecting good producers that you don't like or don't know.
  - Employees will ultimately give you what you reward. If you reward popular, friendly non-producers, you will soon find yourself managing a failing, non-productive group of people that like you.
- Not knowing what you want or need.
  - If you don't have a vision, a mission, or a set of well thought out values that you seek, then you won't know who's giving them to you and who isn't. If you don't know what you want, then it doesn't make any difference what you get.
- Micro managing.
  - This tells employees emphatically that, a) you don't trust them, b) you think they're incapable or stupid, c) you have way too much time on your hands.
  - You will lose the valuable input you might otherwise get from employees.
- Not letting employees know what is expected of them: their obligations.
  - Keep their "eyes on the prize," guide them, coach them. Question them about their ability and if they have the resources or materials to do this job.
- Making employees responsible for the results but not giving them the authority, the "freedom to act" to best produce them.
- Failing to keep the machine rolling.
  - A good manager once described her management as: I view my team as a coach and horses. I constantly check with them all to assure their direction; I bring them water, I fix the broken wheels, I

constantly circle the group taking everyone's pulse, feeding them, wiping their nose, listening to their concerns, encouraging them, refocussing their attention, making sure they have the cargo on board, everyone's going in the same direction, and that everything that needs greasing gets greased. I'm the facilitator, the water boy, the coach, the provider, and when they succeed they say, "look at the great job we've done."

- Creating the "mediocrity wins" company.
  - By paying and rewarding everyone with the 3% to 6% annual increase, including high, mediocre and poor performers to maintain the "status quo," you soon find that you're good and high producers and "boat rockers" leave. Some of your poor performers get terminated and your mediocre employees last forever. Many times I have revisited companies many years later. The good managers and producers are mostly gone, but the mediocre clerk, who was never a good producer is now a very high paid employee which he accomplished just by sticking around and collecting the annual 4% raise, compounded annually.
- Failure to identify employees' goals and values as well as the company's.
  - Good managers motivate people by aligning what they want with what the company wants. In other words, "You can get what I know you want if you can help the company get what I know it wants." In many ways they may both want the same things.
- Not allowing employees to be better than they are.
  - Often the wisest or best manager is the one who lays back and allows the employee to emerge to the forefront. This is done by presenting goals and asking for advice, or presenting problems, questions, seeking suggestions, brainstorming, etc., convincing the employee that they are capable of solving these problems.
- Mistaking people as good managers because they are demanding, harsh or controlling.
  - Many bad harmful managers were promoted because they were disliked and

feared without determining whether or not they're good, productive managers.

- Criticizing in public, praising in private.
  - Criticism properly used is coaching and needs to be done in a personal confidential manner. Praising, commanding is a public matter and employees want everyone to know of their achievement. So it's "praise in public, criticize in private." When others see an employee gain this praise, they too strive to achieve it.
- Treating employees as an under class.
  - Assuming, even unconsciously, that employees are a "lower tiered" group that even though they be treated with respect, it's a lesser level of respect. Today's employee more and more needs to be treated as people. People you meet on the street, people you meet through friends. Require them to meet their responsibilities, but treat them at least as well as you would a total stranger.
  - We have seen several cases over the years of employers experiencing theft on the job and indiscriminately charging all employees a pro-rata share of the loss and deducting it from their paychecks. There is a famous case of a nationwide bus company experiencing theft and began alphabetically terminating employees A to Z. They were well into the "C's" when the lawsuits started.
- Failure to develop and train employees to a higher skill level or job.
  - Improving your asset as opposed to draining it is good management. Your best employees won't stay stagnant. They want to improve and to be improved.
  - Assess your future needs. What new products (or product changes) will you be producing in the next 2-5-10 years? What kind of employee (or training) will you need then?
- Paying the new hire as much as or more than your existing employees.
  - That's okay if the new employee is better skilled or whose value is demonstrably clear to all. But when you assume that your existing employees cannot be

developed or promoted but that the next guru you hire and overpay will walk on water, you will alienate your existing team.

- Issuing bonuses when the company is not performing well.
  - In a recent case a county government was actually facing bankruptcy and closed some schools. While at the same time every county employee except one received a performance bonus.
  - It does no good to say that "our team did good work" even though the company was failing. The goal is not for one department to excel (possibly by tripping up another) but for the company to excel. That opens the door to those who helped make that happen. By requiring the company to be profitable, employees realize the importance of all elements joining forces, to search out problems, to go beyond your immediate area to assure a smooth path to profit.
- Settling for what you get instead of demanding what you need.
  - That's the easy, lazy way that, regrettably, too many managers follow today. You need the courage to reject the wrong results and demand what the job requires. Set a high standard and get it.
- Applying different standards or rules to different employees.
  - Employees remember what you did before and they'll know when you apply a different standard to another. If there's a good reason to do so, find a way to address the reason why to employees.
- Failure to fit the assignment to the individual (and/or vice versa).
  - Don't assign a job for a team player to an employee who clearly is a loner. One who performs best making their own decisions and acting independently will use those skills to get the job done. (Unless you're trying to develop the employee or expose them to other methods.) Try to fit the assignment to the employee. The more you know about the employee and the more you can find out about the assignment the more you can match them.

- Being too quick to terminate.
  - These are the people you have chosen to work with, they're the flowers you have been growing. Before you accept defeat and discard them, try to develop, train or improve them. It's infinitely less expensive and less time consuming and likely more productive to explain to them your intent to develop them and then do so.
- When you terminate someone, don't abuse or insult them.
  - Don't confiscate their desk, lock their office, call a security guard in and escort them out of the office. You'll pay for that insult in many ways. Treat that employee as if their next job was going to be the loan manager at your bank.

Our list, of course, is not 100% all encompassing. It's a good basket full of examples we here at HRA have seen over the years. It's not meant to be the dictionary of bad management, but we hope a very useful tool to use as a mirror. In the end you can ask yourself, "Am I creating more harm than good? Would I have been better off with no management at all?"

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