

Practical Strategies Online!

Summer 2007

The email and Web newsletter
on organization and management issues

From Michael H. Smith, Ph.D. & Associates

In this issue:

Dept. of Work: The Four Hidden Dimensions in Executive Coaching

The Four Hidden Dimensions in Executive Coaching

A valued senior manager is curt with direct reports, gives vague directions and does not provide feedback on a consistent basis. The feedback that he gives is laced with sarcasm and impugns their competence. At meetings, the senior manager often gets red in the face when his decisions are questioned and will yell when it strikes him. Such behavior also occurs with clients and stockholders.

The manager may be suffering from burnout; or his workload may be too high; or he may have personal problems at home. He may even have a disorder that requires medication. On the face of it, this seems like a coaching assignment. Get feedback, preferably 360 degrees, confront the manager, put an improvement plan in place and let the coach do his work.

This is a reasonable way to address this problem and many organizations will take this route. And usually it's partially successful. Yet coaching frequently ignores the Four Hidden Dimensions that the organization may be lacking and these almost certainly, and significantly, contribute to the manager's problems.

These manager problems don't take place in a vacuum; they are exacerbated by the organizational dimensions in which they occur. Ignoring these dimensions may lead to all kinds of end-state problems such as a

manager's resignation or termination. And a manager's resignation will cost your organization almost twice his compensation in salary and lost productivity before a new person is found and is capable of replacing him.

Let's look at the Four hidden Dimensions that need to be in place for coaching to be truly successful.

Dimension 1. Leadership: a unified vision and agreed upon core values

Leadership is what holds the pieces of an organization together. Specifically, without a clear unified vision, the organization breaks into silos where each manager is concerned solely about his function. Some managers who make efforts to look at the larger organizational picture and attempt to work with managers in other silos are not appreciated. They are often perceived as taking away resources from their main area or as naive and even disloyal. The resultant system stress can cause performance issues.

The lack of core values as to how the organization "speaks" limits feedback. Without agreement on communication, conflict resolution, respect and integrity, there are limited ways to correct behavior and organizational direction. Without this foundation, talking with a manager who is volatile is a high risk affair and smart employees usually won't take the risk.

Dimension 2. Accountability for behavior at the senior management level.

Most managers avoid conflict and those in senior positions are no exception. At the senior level, the assumption is that everyone is excellent and inappropriate behavior is often ignored. It's extremely uncomfortable to tell a manager with a one million dollar package that she needs to treat members of the team, as well as her employees, consistent with the company's core values. Ignoring the problems simply says that it's OK to behave poorly.

Dimension 3. Regular performance feedback.

Performance feedback is a key tool to reinforcing desirable behavior and correcting behavior that is not wanted. All managers must learn how to do this regularly and constructively.

Poor behavior rarely sprouts out of nowhere. It's more often an accumulation of marginal behaviors that have been ignored in the hope that they somehow will get better. What is needed at the senior level is a

structured peer feedback process where all team members give each other regular feedback.

Such a structured feedback process must also include perceptions of direct reports. This improves accountability within functions and allows employees to be heard.

Dimension 4. Rewards that drive behavior.

The main reward for senior managers comes with the achievement of sales and financial goals. Compensation is usually geared to these goals. But to enforce desirable behaviors, manager compensation must also be connected to how they reward the employees under their direction in crucial areas such as:

- Encouraging the development of innovative products or services
- Enhancing knowledge and professional development
- Retaining the best employees
- Coaching and mentoring

By rewarding managers for success in these areas, you send a message that they are important and must be taken seriously.

Poor manager performance and the need for coaching isn't created in a vacuum. Organizational processes also have a powerful impact on behavior. While you're trying to improve the individual, take a look at key organizational dimensions that need to be improved as well.

Michael H. Smith, Ph.D
Michael H. Smith, Ph.D. and Associates

Conflict Resolution * Productivity Improvement

3640 Grand Ave., Ste. 204
Oakland, CA 94610
510-832-8500
Fax: 510-832-8505
email:mhsmith@michaelhsmithphd.com

Visit our World Wide Web site at:
www.michaelhsmithphd.com

Member of:

- San Francisco Bar Assoc.
- Northern California Human Resources Assoc.
- American Society for Training and Development