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What Makes a Great Manager?

by Richard F. Libin

Why do you need a manager?

A manager's most important job is to make decisions that help to make their people more successful, period. If a person wins, so do managers.

Think about it this way. If every person that a manager is responsible for succeeds, they all win. Look at Dunkin' Donuts; they follow a simple, straightforward formula. To retain satisfied, loyal customers, they must serve quality food, quickly in a positive manner – they need to keep the line moving, whether inside the store or at the drive-thru. This is the managers' job – to make sure that every employee understands that their priority is serving customers, and that keeping the store clean, ensuring the right supplies are available, brewing coffee, and completing other jobs help them succeed in doing so. The manager helps his people succeed in this job by working side-by-side with them; they lead by example. This simple formula makes the Dunkin' Donuts business flourish.

The same is true for every business regardless of the industry, product, or service. Unfortunately, most managers don't really know what their jobs are. When managers don't understand their jobs, and when they don't manage using a consistent process, the manager is broken.

It leads to questions like, "Who trained your manager to be a manager?" and "What schools exist that successfully train and educate people to manage people?" The answer to the second question is that there are none. Schools teach people how to manage things – profit and loss, inventory, product development, manufacturing, inventory, quality, etc. They don't really teach people how to manage people. All of us are in the people business! Every business is all about people.

How many times have you heard or said, "If I only had the right people?" Well, who developed the people you have? It's management's job to do so. New managers come to their role in one of two ways: they are hired from outside or they are promoted from within. Those that are promoted from within will always have an edge – they understand established policies, procedures, and processes; they know the company, culture, people, vision, strengths and weaknesses. Those hired from outside, while expected to hit the ground running, don't have this essential knowledge. As a result, they use systems and processes from their old company and make changes that might not fit their new environment.

Managers who are promoted from within make changes that enhance the process; they don't try to change it. They seek input from the people who have first-hand experience, then use the feedback to adjust and improve. They don't adjust processes to fit the people; they help people perform using established processes and make sure that the right people are in the right job.

Great managers lead by example. They start off each day by making sure everybody is ready to do business. They start with a daily meeting making sure that they have a positive attitude, set and focus on goals, and make sure everyone

knows the game plan. They never stay in their offices, keeping busy, surrounded – or protected – by walls. Instead, they interact with people and know about what goes on in their business.

Managers promoted from within are trained on existing processes. They've had opportunities to succeed, fail, and learn from day-to-day interactions. They've invested time and effort into learning the business. They understand the need to develop people, to leverage their strengths and to improve their weaknesses. They outline and communicate roadmaps, coach, train, educate, and guide them so they learn how to do it themselves. They praise in public and "scold" in private.

Great managers understand that in order to move ahead themselves, they need to train their own replacements.

No business should ever be manager broken. When managers truly understand that their job is to ensure their people know their roles, have a roadmap to follow, and then to help their people succeed, everyone wins – people, management, businesses, and of course, the customers win, too.

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