



Leading for Results

Taking the High Road While Improving the Bottom Line

Managers: Use these strategies to help employees manage their careers

The old “employment contract” is gone, and employees aren’t guaranteed lifetime employment anymore. They are responsible for managing their careers, and as a manager, it’s a good business strategy to help them. It builds loyalty and trust and makes for wiser, more efficient workers. Here are some programs that any manager can easily put in place:

- **Host monthly “Career Development Days” with employees.** Set aside one day a month to sit down with employees one-to-one and discuss where they are in their careers, where they want to go, what skills they’ll need to get there, and what opportunities are available in the department and in the company at large. Take notes at each meeting, so you can track progress.
- **Start a “Professional Development Club.”** Assign each of your employees a different industry-related trade publication. Once a week, have a “Reading Meeting.” Ask employees to relate any interesting stories, trends, or products that they uncovered in their reading.
- **When you attend a conference, bring it back with you.** Whenever you attend an industry conference, take detailed notes, and turn them into a presentation for employees. Bring them up-to-speed on the hot topics, what they should read up on, new skills and opportunities, and so on. (This is also a great way for you to remember material.)
- **Ask managers to hold in-house seminars.** Employees can benefit from learning how a business is run: basic accounting skills, financial forecasting, budgeting, and so on. Ask managers in these areas to conduct seminars on different topics for your employees—and offer to do the same for them.
- **Be a “mentor headhunter.”** You can’t be a mentor to everyone; but you can help employees find mentors elsewhere in the company. Use your influence and standing to reach out to other managers.

Run every managerial decision through this ‘ethical checklist’

Whenever you’re faced with a tough decision, ask yourself these three questions:

1. **Is it legal?** Will you be violating either company policy or the law?
2. **Is it fair and balanced?** Are all people involved in the decision being treated fairly—in both the short and long term? Will certain individuals get hurt?
3. **How will I feel when it’s done?** How will the decision make you feel about yourself? Will you be proud of what you did? If it was published in the newspaper, would you feel good about your friends and family reading it?

—Adapted from *The Power of Ethical Management*, by Kenneth Blanchard and Norman Vincent Peale (Fawcett Columbine)

Are you guilty of giving your employees an ethical ‘flea dip’?

See page 2

Once you master the hiring process, you may never have to fire anyone again!

See page 4

Check out the successful policies and programs some organizations are using to motivate and retain employees.

See ‘At Other Companies’ on pages 5 and 13

Follow these guidelines to conduct performance reviews that reap huge dividends.

See page 6

Beware the five deadly sins of management!

See page 8

What’s going on in Corporate America? Keep current with the latest trends and statistics.

See ‘News from the Frontlines’ on page 9

Test your problem-solving skills with this dilemma.

See ‘A Matter of Principle’ on page 15

Sever employee ties the right way

Occasions will arise when you have to let an employee go. How you handle it determines how smooth the process will be. Here are some strategies that experienced managers use:

- **Make thorough preparations before firing an employee.** By documenting a new hire's performance from the beginning of his or her tenure, you have wisely provided a foundation for the worst-case scenario (firing) should it materialize. Don't look for negatives, but don't bury them or try to ignore them, either.
- **Remember: If the employee is surprised, you haven't done your job.** No employee should ever be "shocked" when they're let go. As a manager, it's your job to offer feedback and criticism to wayward employees. By the time you're forced to fire someone, so many other options should have been explored that the person is almost "ready" to be let go.
- **Offer a "Career Decision Day" as a last resort if repeated warnings don't work.** On Friday, tell the employee to take Monday off, with pay, as a Career Decision Day. Ask him or her to be prepared on Tuesday morning to make one of two choices: 1) To improve in all areas where he or she is lacking; or 2) To accept termination with appropriate severance pay. If the

employee opts for improvement, set very specific goals with deadlines.

- **Don't mix the good with the bad.** Many managers make the mistake of being too nice when letting someone go. They feel guilty, so they try to sugarcoat it: "Well, John, you really did some good things here, but unfortunately your chronic inability to stay organized overshadows all the positives." That sends a mixed message and may confuse the employee. When firing someone, leave the good out.
- **Don't talk about the situation.** Firing someone is a traumatic experience, and the temptation is to want to talk about it with others. Don't. Don't look for support; don't try to rationalize it to other managers or your other employees. Talking about it is not only unprofessional, but it could pave the way for a libel lawsuit against your company.
- **Be ready to be angry.** Often, managers wait too long before firing someone, letting anger and frustration build up. These emotions are likely to surface if the employee starts to question your decision. Be ready for this, and remain professional. Present your facts and documentation, and don't argue with the employee.

unity

Diversity without unity makes about as much sense as dishing up flour, sugar, water, eggs, shortening, and baking powder on a plate and calling it a cake.

—C. William Pollard, author of *The Soul of the Firm*



people vs. product

People are a firm's most important asset. If you have an excellent product but only mediocre people, the results will be only mediocre.

—Richard Sloma, author of *The Turnaround Manager's Handbook*

Are you guilty of giving your employees an ethical 'flea dip'?

Ethics management consultant Frank J. Navran warns managers about ethical "flea dips." Think about a dog that's infested with fleas. You take it to the vet, who dips it in a flea bath and kills the fleas. But if you don't get rid of the fleas in the carpet, on the couch, and in the drapes—if you don't change the environment—the dog's just going to pick up fleas again. Navran says the same thing holds true for organizations. In order to become an ethical organization, you need to change the entire culture. Here are the first two steps to take:

1. **Put the right people in the right place.** It's crucial to put people in charge who are behind your efforts to change the organization. Promote people who get on board. Turn the people who commit to change into organizational leaders.
2. **Reward people who are behind the change efforts.** Not people who say they are behind the change. Seek out those people who are leading by *example* and reward them—both the top executives and those who are bringing change about at the grassroots level.

What did you learn from employees this week?

As a manager, do you *really* listen to your employees? Take this test. Every Friday afternoon, write down three things that you learned from employees that week. *Examples:* An insight about a customer; a better way to handle a process; reasons why a project didn't work. There's so much to learn from employees that if you can't list at *least* three things a week, you're probably not listening carefully enough.

If you have to downsize, help employees land on their feet

If your company *has* to downsize, set up an ongoing employment "agency." It doesn't have to be expensive. Buy some résumé-writing books and software for the downsized workers; dedicate one or two computer terminals and phones for them to use; schedule informal "workshops" where employees can critique each other's résumés; if you employ designers, ask them to design and format these résumés and cover letters. Show that you care about and have a personal interest in the people you're letting go.

'Think for number four'

Jet fighters fly in fours, and each four-jet formation has a leader who holds life-and-death responsibility for the formation. Once in a great while, during a complicated aerial maneuver, an entire formation of four jets will crash. That's because the second, third, and fourth jets are "flying the leader's wing," and will follow the number-one jet anywhere—even into the ground. So the leaders must adopt a "think for number four" mindset: Before they make a move, they have to consider how it will

affect the other jets in the formation. Managers would be wise to adopt the same mindset: Before making a decision, think of how it will affect everyone in your department—all of your "number fours."

—Adapted from *Life & Work: A Manager's Search for Meaning*, by James A. Autry (Avon Business)

Hold monthly lunch meetings with special guest speakers

Poll employees to see what topics will be most helpful to them, and bring in experts to speak on those subjects. Managers can sponsor speakers on: eldercare options; raising teenagers; choosing the right school for children; career strategies; parenting issues; continuing education opportunities; and many other topics. Many social service agencies will send speakers for free. Ask other managers to take turns signing up speakers. Use the function as an opportunity to bring different departments together and to get to know one another.

Find an executive in your company whose values and principles you admire

Invite that person to address your employees in a meeting. Ask the executive to cover topics such as: the importance of ethics in business; how to make principled decisions; some of the ethical situations facing the company; real-life examples of how principles helped the executive's career; and any other topic you feel will help your employees.

Your small company won't fund an on-site daycare center?

That's an opportunity for you to shine as a manager. Spend an hour

or two doing some research (or have an assistant or intern do it for you). Compile a list of local daycare facilities with solid reputations, and, if possible, work out an arrangement with several of them. For instance, for a small donation, they could reserve spots for your employees' children. Next month, compile eldercare resources. Your employees will appreciate your extra efforts.

Let employees give colleagues a day off

Create a "Days Off Bank" and use it to motivate employees. Put 25 days in the bank. Allow employees to recognize the accomplishments of their colleagues by assigning them a "Dollar Day." When employees collect ten Dollar Days, they can cash them in for one of the days off in the bank. This system will encourage employees to recognize and appreciate peers who work hard, and it will build a sense of camaraderie and teamwork within your department. By limiting the days in the bank, you prevent people from handing out Dollar Days unless they are warranted.

Harvest the special skills of new hires

Often, job applicants have skills they don't even know about. If they've been in the job market for a while, they've picked up experience that you could put to use: The ability to market themselves, for instance. Or the one-on-one people skills they've developed after sitting through countless interviews. Or the writing skills and creativity they honed writing dozens of cover letters. Harness these "new" skills and put them to work for the department.

Once you master the hiring process, you may never have to fire anyone again

There are managers in Corporate America who have never had to fire an employee. They have refined and honed the hiring process to such a precise science that it's a rare occasion when a candidate doesn't succeed. There are three stages of the hiring process, and each stage has proven strategies that you can use to weed out poor candidates and get new hires off on the right foot.

1. The Prehiring Process

- **Interview people who already work for you.** Pick your best employees, and talk to them. Make a list of common qualities; write profiles of perfect employees. Look for candidates who match those profiles.
- **Do your best *not* to hire anyone.** Just because you lose a worker, don't immediately assume you have to hire a replacement. Can you reassign work without overburdening people? Can you eliminate unnecessary work? Many managers who hire as a first reaction realize later that they didn't need to fill that open position and then are faced with letting go of someone.
- **The first place to look for "new" employees:** your own company. Hiring and promoting from within not only increases morale, it also gives you candidates with track records you already know—or can easily reference with other managers and HR.
- **Write down on a piece of paper:** "I will not lower my standards." Many managers get desperate after the 20th interview and convince themselves that a particular candidate is "good enough." Put your promise to yourself where you can see it, and stick to it. Hiring subpar candidates inevitably leads to firing subpar workers.

2. The Interview Process

- **Learn to spot "producers."** Don't focus on job descriptions—anyone can write those. Focus on specific projects candidates completed and the results. Have them talk at length about the process. Hire people with a proven production record—not fancy résumés.
- **Send candidates to lunch with a trusted employee after the interview.** Candidates are on their best behavior during interviews, often giving rehearsed answers to canned questions. At lunch, they let their guard down—especially when the interviewer isn't present. Have your trusted lieutenant brief you on the lunch.
- **Ask this question to test their maturity level:** "What were the strengths and weaknesses of your past supervisors? If they take repeated stabs at former bosses, no

matter how subtle, you may be dealing with someone who has a problem with authority.

- **Ask this question to see if they can accept blame:** "What was your biggest failure in your last job?" If the candidate puts it off on others and doesn't accept any of the responsibility, you may have a problem on your hands.
- **Use this test to see if you're dealing with a team player:** When candidates answer the questions above regarding former employment, listen to the pronouns they use. Do they always say "I" this and "I" that? Or do they refer to "we" when talking about their former jobs? You want "we" people. It means they built strong team bonds—and probably will again, with your team.
- **Write things down!** Studies have shown that interviewers who don't take notes retain only one-fourth of what they've heard. If you're interviewing a dozen people, you'll mix up observations and start to run every candidate together. Develop a shorthand code for writing down personal observations, characteristics you like or don't like, and so on.

3. The Initiation Process

Once you've hired the right person, the last step is crucial: Get them off on the right foot. Use these strategies to welcome new hires and turn them into productive, motivated workers right from the start.

- **Have their business cards waiting for them.** It's a great way of saying, "Welcome to the team."
- **Outfit the employee's workstation.** Make sure the computer is working and loaded with the appropriate software; stock the desk with office supplies; provide a company directory and handbook. *Extra touches:* Buy a plant or coffee mug.
- **Use the Buddy System.** Remember summer camp? Pick an employee with good communication skills and assign him or her to be the new hire's "buddy." Buddies are in charge of showing the new employees around, going to lunch with them the first few days, explaining the company hierarchy and culture—and, most important, answering the many questions all new hires have.
- **Make time to meet with new hires—every day.** At least for the first week, meet with new hires for 15 minutes at the end of every day: Answer their questions, review their responsibilities, and so on. Let new hires know you're behind them from the beginning.



At other companies . . .

Management trainees ride the trucks at UPS

As part of its three-week management orientation program, United Parcel Service makes sure its new managers understand the relationship between its customers and the people with the most contact—company drivers. Each new manager spends one day riding with a package car driver, and that day is always a highlight of the training, according to company officials. “The overriding observation is they are amazed how many businesses don’t think twice about letting us in the back door, where the money or the inventory is. It’s taken for granted that the UPS guy is someone you can trust,” says human resources training manager Chris Boone.

—Adapted from “Training for leadership: Employee education boosts bottom line, gives guidance,” by Victoria Dempsey, in *Business First* magazine

Quick snoozes allowed

Taking an afternoon nap at work is okay at Deloitte Consulting in Pittsburgh. In fact, they’ve set up a nap room with reclining chairs and blankets for employees to use when they need a quick 40 winks. It’s part of a growing realization that a sleep-deprived workforce is a less productive and creative workforce. The Deloitte nap room is growing in acceptance throughout the office, thanks in part to its use by partners and senior managers. “People are now understanding that it’s acceptable,” says HR director Sandy Dennis.

—Adapted from “Caught napping? That’s okay,” by Alison Kurdock, on the CNN Web site

Hewlett-Packard takes unusual approaches to traditional issues

Looking for some creative alternatives to traditional business meetings? Take a cue from Hewlett-Packard. When the Integrated Circuit division wanted to implement a new business plan, a company organizational development specialist put the plan on trial—literally. Members of the division received a summons for jury duty in a hotel meeting room. A team of internal skeptics brought a charge of “difficulty of implementation.” The defense consisted of the division’s general manager and marketing manager. By staging a trial, the company showed how serious a decision adopting a new business plan can be. By the way, the defense won, and the plan was implemented.

Another time, when H-P was forced to eliminate its Printed Circuit Board division and reassign employees to different areas, the company held a New Orleans-style funeral, complete with pallbearers dressed in black and a jazz band. A procession marched through the division’s closing plant,

inviting employees to don black robes and place items that represented their time in the department into an open coffin. Outside the plant, “mourners” listened to a 30-minute eulogy that described the division’s life. Once the funeral was over, the jazz band changed its tune to Mardi Gras party music, and the event became a celebration of a new beginning. The funeral provided employees with a sense of closure, but also opened their minds to the possibilities of the future.

—Adapted from “The people of Hewlett-Packard vs. the past,” by Eric Matson, in *Fast Company* magazine

‘Employee resource groups’ change policies at automaker

General Motors has adjusted its “escort” policy, which formerly paid for the traveling expenses of employees’ spouses on business trips. The new policy now covers expenses for unmarried partners of the same or opposite sex, or any other person the employee wants to bring to company events. The policy change is one of several responses to recommendations made by eight “employee resource groups” after a year of meetings. The eight groups represented gays and lesbians, women, Asian-Americans, Hispanics, people with disabilities, non-U.S. citizens working in the United States, African-Americans, and white males. Other policy changes made as a result of the groups’ recommendations include an on-site childcare center at GM’s headquarters and other locations, and a “mobility center,” focusing on the needs of the disabled and aging population with regard to both GM’s products and its facilities.

—Adapted from “GM modernizes worker policies,” by Anita Lienert, in the *Detroit News*

Accept the inevitable: Employees will shop online at work

Let’s be honest: If your employees have too many personal demands, they’re going to use company time to deal with them. If you accept that premise, you might want to follow the lead of Tandy Corporation/RadioShack. For the holidays, the “Lunchtime Online” program kicked off. Employees were formally allowed to shop for gifts at their desktop terminals during lunch and other breaks. In addition, the company installed three high-speed computer terminals in a common area of its Ft. Worth, Texas, corporate headquarters for employees to use between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., five days a week. “To the extent we can help employees do what they need to do as quickly as possible, we’ll be a more productive workplace,” says company president Leonard Roberts.

—Adapted from PRNewswire

Learn to respect employees' time, and you'll increase productivity

In this age of “do more with less,” employees value every minute of the workday. As a manager, you need to respect their time and value it as much as they do. Here are some things to remember:

- **Don't abuse your cell phone.** When you're on the commute home, and you know a key employee is working late, it's tempting to call to talk business. Don't. Employees don't arrive early or stay late for fun—they are trying to accomplish something, and giving up their personal time to do so. Let them work in peace.
- **Ask for permission to extend meeting times.** Set specific times for meetings, and then insist that everyone—yourself included—is on time. When assigning a time, set a finishing time as well, so employees can better schedule their days. (“We'll meet from 10 to 10:45.”) If the meeting proves to be productive and you don't want to quit at the designated time, ask employees if it's okay to extend the meeting—and offer employees who need to leave the chance to do so.
- **Learn to make “24-hour promises—and stick to them.** When an employee comes to you with a question, and you don't know the answer, don't blow it off. They'll waste time finding the answer somewhere else. Tell them, “I'll be in my office 24 hours from now with an answer. Meet me here.” Then jot down the problem, and the appointed time in your day planner. Make sure you have an answer waiting.
- **Create a “Time Suckers” committee.** Have committee members weed out unnecessary, time-wasting reports, meetings, processes, and so on. Encourage other employees to nominate things to be eliminated. Keep track of your progress on a “Time Suckers” bulletin board.
- **Reward the families of hardworking employees.** If workers are staying late on an important project, their family life often suffers. Send their spouses a card—or, better yet, a dinner or movie voucher. Let them know you don't take the extra time for granted.

truth

Remember: One lie does not cost one truth,
but the truth.
—Friedrich Hebbel, dramatist



make a difference

It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference.
—Tom Brokaw, journalist

Properly conducted performance reviews pay huge dividends

Employee reviews can be one of the most powerful management tools in your arsenal—or a morale-sucking waste of everybody's time. It all depends on how the manager conducts the process. Remember these crucial points:

- **Take financials out of the equation.** Too often, performance reviews turn into salary negotiations. Hold two *separate* meetings—one to review performance and set goals; and one to discuss raises and bonuses.
- **Don't run an assembly line.** A lot of managers hate the review process, so they schedule them all in the same week or even on the same day in order to get them over with. Schedule no more than one review per day, so you have time to cover all the bases, answer questions, preview the future, set goals, and so on.
- **Preview, rather than Review.** Don't get caught up thinking that reviews have to focus entirely on the past—rehashing every right and wrong move the employee made over the last year. Spend the majority of the review time on the future: What do you expect in the coming year? How can we take what happened in the past and apply it to the future? What are your goals, and what are the employee's?
- **Don't compare employees to your “star” workers** in order to motivate them. Employees don't like being compared unfavorably to their peers. Instead, focus on the individual's strengths and weaknesses.
- **Don't use yourself as an example, either.** As soon as you say, “When I was in your position . . .” you lose the employee, for the same reasons listed above.
- **Keep personality out of it** unless it relates to work performance. It's unreasonable to expect people to change their personalities. This would indicate that the employee and the company are not a good match. However, if a shift in behavior would positively affect a person's performance or relationship with coworkers, the change should be suggested.

Write a job description for your 'boss,' and then use it to guide your own actions

Managers: Take 20 minutes and write a job description for yourself. As a guideline, pretend you are writing it for someone who is going to be *your* supervisor. Pretend that your new "boss" will be checking this description every day. What would you want to emphasize? What important qualities do you want your boss to have? *Some examples:* Give employees honest feedback; be patient of mistakes—as long as the same ones don't keep recurring; don't overload employees; remember that employees have lives outside the office; and so on. Then, take a few minutes every day, first thing, and read over your job description. Let it serve as a reminder of what kind of boss you want to work for—and what kind of boss you want to be.

Develop a 'cheat sheet' of questions to ask employees

To stay on top of what your employees do (and how and why they're doing it), develop a "cheat sheet" of questions to ask. Customize a list for each employee and sit down once a month to go over it. Ask them specific questions about their jobs, such as, "Are you still having problems with the Morton account?" and "How did you solve the marketing problem for the new launch?" Also have a group of "core" questions that you ask every employee, such as "What was the biggest obstacle you encountered last month, and how did you get around it?"

Remember the 'forgotten employees'

Often, busy managers tend to overlook support staff—secretaries, administrative assistants, etc. While not actively involved in business strategy as much as other employees, these people are often the glue that holds a department together. Show these people that you take what they do seriously. *Try this tactic:* Give them a "budget"—say of \$100 per month—to use any way they see fit. They could buy special office supplies, order lunch for the department, and so on. It's a simple way to show them that you appreciate their work and trust their judgment.

Hold monthly 'gripe sessions'

Smart managers *want* employees to complain. Every employee has problems with the department; if they aren't complaining to the manager, they're keeping everything inside—and you won't know it until they leave. Encourage complaints. Hold a monthly "Gripe Session" where employees can air their concerns. Don't hold gripe sessions in the conference room, though. Employees will still feel like they're "at work" and may not speak freely. Arrange to meet at a local coffeehouse the first Friday of every month. *Important:* Do it on company time, not the employees' time. And don't let people attack individuals.

It pays to advertise employee-friendly policies

It's a fact that employees are drawn to ethical organizations with good work/life policies. Make sure your company develops that kind of reputation. Lists of "good places to work,"

like the one published in *Working Mother* magazine, still hold sway, and top recruits check them regularly. If your company merits recognition for its employee-friendly policies, get it placed on such a list.

Write a short news story about yourself every month

At the end of every month (or week, if time permits), write a short "news story" about your work-related decisions. Don't worry about the quality of the writing—just capture the highlights of what you did, i.e., reviewing employees, disciplining employees, running meetings, dealing with supervisors, handing out praise and criticism, etc. Then, look at your "story." Would you be comfortable if it ran in your local paper? Would it be okay if your friends saw it? If you have no problem publishing your story every month, odds are good that you are managing your employees and career in an ethical manner.

Find a deeper cause to motivate workers

Employees will feel more motivated and fulfilled by their work if you can link their activities to a deeper cause. At Fairmont Hotels, for example, a recycling program asked maids to spend extra time separating recyclables from regular waste. One maid interviewed said she didn't mind the effort: "Doing the recycling is the most important part of my job," she said, "and makes me feel like I did something important in the day." Remember that sentiment when you ask employees to do something extra for a good cause.

—Adapted from the T.R. Moore & Company Web site

Three things to remember as you succeed in corporate life

As you move up the ladder at your company, there are certain habits you need to develop in order to remain successful. If you do these three simple things, you'll establish a solid relationship with your peers and employees, make friends in powerful places, and build a network of colleagues who admire and support you.

- **Reserve a half hour every day to return calls.** Even if it means cutting into your lunch hour. Develop a reputation as someone who “always gets back to people right away.” It sends the message that you respect others. Also, people will be much more likely to call you back when you need them to.
- **Demand that people criticize you.** There are two types of managers: those who avoid criticism at all costs because they think it makes them look weak; and those

who encourage criticism and use it to improve their performance. Be the latter kind of manager. Let your colleagues, supervisors, and employees know that you welcome criticism, as long as it is constructive.

- **Reputations are built at the bottom, not the top.** Remember the low-level manager who helped you so much when you were first starting out? When was the last time you took her to lunch? What about the team of employees who worked so hard on the project that garnered you so much praise? Did you thank them and point out their accomplishments? As you move up to the next level, don't forget about the people on the previous one. These “little people” are responsible for your success—and they hold your reputation in their hands.

charity

When company executives get involved in charity work, it sends the message that the leaders are invested in their community, that there's more to life than making a profit, and that they care about their employees having balanced lives.

—Dr. Ann McGee-Cooper, business consultant



compensation

Stock option plans reward the executive for doing the wrong thing. Instead of asking, “Are we making the right decisions?” he asks, “How did we close today?” It is encouragement to loot the corporation.

—Peter Drucker, business expert

Five managerial mistakes that hurt the integrity of your company

Most unethical or unprincipled behavior found in companies happens for one of five reasons. Individual managers need to be ever vigilant to make sure they aren't committing one or more of these five deadly sins:

1. **Favoring the company's interests** over the interests of its stakeholders: customers, employees, the community, and the public. *Examples:* underpaying employees because the job market is tough and “they have nowhere else to go”; reducing hazardous waste disposal costs by discharging waste illegally.
2. **Rewarding behavior that violates ethical standards.** *Examples:* handing out sales bonuses for advertising campaigns that misrepresent the product; rewarding managers who are “under budget,” even though it meant they cut corners where they shouldn't have and pushed employees too hard.
3. **Creating a corporate environment that encourages separate standards** of behavior for work and home. *Example:* allowing employees to pass the buck rather than take responsibility; punishing people for being honest about mistakes—thereby encouraging secrecy and deceit; and rewarding individuals who grandstand while ignoring solid, but quiet, team players.
4. **Allowing individuals to abuse power to further their own interests.** *Examples:* managers who take excessive compensation for themselves “off the top,” before other stakeholders get their share; executives who promote friends over more-qualified employees in order to surround themselves with friendly faces.
5. **Creating managerial values that undermine integrity.** *Examples:* the “Madison Avenue Mentality” that believes anything is right if the public can be convinced it is right; being more concerned with *appearing* ethical than being ethical; exploiting workers and cutting corners on quality to benefit the almighty bottom line.

—Adapted from *Quality Progress* (American Society for Quality Control)



News from the frontlines

Workers may want flexibility, but don't always ask for it

Your employees may not be asking for flexible working arrangements, but don't assume that they're not interested. In a survey of 505 working employees, 59 percent said they felt reluctant to ask their current employers about flexible working options; the most common reason was fear of the perception that they weren't serious about their careers. The employees surveyed had interviewed with Flexible Resource Inc., a consulting firm specializing in flexible workplace arrangements. Two-thirds said they were interested in permanent part-time work, and 49 percent were looking for a full-time position with flexible hours. Two-thirds had already left a previous, full-time job with traditional working arrangements to seek a position that offered more flexibility; another 22 percent were about to quit for the same reason. —Adapted from “Most workers looking for flexible schedules do not request them from current employer,” in the *BNA Daily Labor Report*

Age discrimination more expensive than other biases

Discriminating against older employees may be just as unethical as showing bias toward any other protected group, but it seems to be more expensive. About 20 percent of all EEOC claims involve age discrimination, but damages in such suits have averaged \$219,000 over the past 3–4 years. That's significantly higher than the average damages paid in cases of, race discrimination (\$147,799), sex (\$106,728), and disability (\$100,345). Employment experts suggest that age cases are incurring higher penalties because higher-paid white-collar workers are more apt to complain now than they were in the past. —Adapted from “Age discrimination costs more than other lawsuits,” in the *Omaha World-Herald*

Generation X likes work, study shows

Generation X may not be the selfish job-hoppers everyone once thought they were. In a study of 1,200 working professionals born between 1964 and 1975, 47 percent said that spending the rest of their working careers with their current organizations would make them happy; 85 percent said their employers' future was something they cared about a great deal; 83 percent said they were willing to go “above and beyond” to help their company succeed; and 75 percent described themselves as “extremely glad” they chose their

current employers to work for. The survey, sponsored by GE and Ernst & Young, was conducted by the consultant group Catalyst. —Adapted from “Survey Reveals The X Factor,” by Anne Bond Emrich, in the *Grand Rapids Business Journal*

Cash register message highlights soft skill deficiency

This is what it's come to: Cash register manufacturer NCR offers retail purchasers a software function that prompts cashiers to say “Hello” and “Thank you” to customers in the checkout line. It's apparently a symptom of an overall lack of so-called “soft”—i.e., nontechnical—skills in today's workforce. In a survey on workforce shortcomings conducted by the National Association of Manufacturers, two-thirds of the Association's 14,000 members said that employees' deficiencies in such soft skills as timeliness, attendance, and general work ethic have hurt their productivity and relations with customers. —Adapted from “Frontline makeover,” by Neal Learner, in the *Christian Science Monitor*

Trim training? You may cut profits as well

Training is one area that typically gets cut when employers need to save money, and the most recent recession was no exception. A survey from the American Society of Training and Development found that U.S. companies spent 12 percent less on training per employee in 2001 than they did in 2000. The ASTD also points out that employers who invested an average of \$1,595 on training per employee per year have a gross profit margin 24 percent higher than companies that spent just \$128. —Adapted from “Training cutbacks could be costly,” by Mary Ellen Podmolik, in *Crain's Chicago Business*

Subsidizing commuting expenses may pay off

Telecommuting may not be an option for keeping good employees on the job, but offering commuting assistance may be. If you're looking for a good retention benefit, keep in mind a study showing that although 86 percent of employees say they would value some form of financial help with commuting expenses, only 17 percent of their employers actually offer such assistance. —Adapted from research conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide

Train yourself in the art of listening

Once you learn how to listen to employees, your managerial skills will improve dramatically. You'll communicate better and solve more problems. Here are some exercises that will improve your listening skills and help you get the most out of each meeting with an employee:

- **Clean off your desk when meeting with employees.** If there are loose papers on your desk, you'll unconsciously start to fiddle with them—and may even start to glance over them. Clear your desk for every conversation with employees, so you can focus your attention on what they're saying.
- **What is the color of the employee's eyes?** Train yourself to notice eye color at the start of every conversation. It ensures that you'll make significant eye contact—which leads to more productive conversations. *Important:* Don't focus so much on eye color that you don't listen to what is being said.
- **Train yourself to ask questions instead of making statements.** *Example:* Don't say, "Joan, don't forget that the Anderson report needs to be in on Monday morning." Rather, say, "How is the Anderson report coming

along, Joan? Any problems with making the deadline?" By asking questions you'll start a dialogue, and you never know what you might learn.

- **Learn to "lubricate" conversations.** Phrases such as "Yes, I see" and "I understand" do two things: 1) They show that you're listening and encourage the other person to keep talking; and 2) They keep your attention focused.
- **Don't blurt out questions as soon as the employee is finished speaking.** It looks as if you were formulating your reply rather than listening. Before you ask a question, paraphrase the employee's words. *Example:* "So what you're saying is . . ." Then, ask your question: "Well, let me ask you this . . ." This cuts down on miscommunication.
- **Don't smile the whole time.** A lot of managers do this because they think it sends a friendly message. It can, but people also often mistake it for mental absence, or a sign that you're not taking them seriously. Save smiles for humorous remarks.

change

If we don't change the direction we're going, we're likely to end up where we are headed.

—Chinese proverb



abuse is evil

Capital as such is not evil; it is its wrong use that is evil.

—Mohandas K. Gandhi, social reformer

Delegating work—the most crucial skill a manager needs to learn

Delegating work properly does a lot more than make your life as a manager easier. It builds teamwork, increases efficiency, develops careers, raises morale, and boosts productivity. But it's not always easy to do. Here are some simple strategies to get you started:

1. **Delegate responsibility, not work.** Too many managers confuse delegating responsibility with dumping work on someone. Employees know the difference. Don't assign a project and insist that the employee do it your way—with no room for personal initiative.
2. **Let employees take turns running staff meetings.** This does three things: First, it shows them that you respect and trust their abilities; second, it builds their confidence and leadership skills; and finally, it gives you a chance to see how someone handles a group—in case you ever consider promoting that person to a managerial position.

3. **When delegating, don't ask an employee, "Do you understand?"** A lot of employees will answer yes regardless—for fear of looking stupid. Instead, ask questions such as, "Any ideas off the top of your head as to how you'll proceed?" You'll get a better sense of whether or not you were clear in your directions.
4. **Keep a "delegation diary."** Once you realize how effective and uplifting proper delegation can be, you'll want to do it more often. Be careful. And be organized. Keep a written record of which projects you've delegated to which employee.
5. **Establish routine checkups.** At the beginning of the delegation process, establish meetings in advance when you and the employee can sit down and make sure everything is on track. *Important:* Don't check up every day. You want employees to feel as if you trust them to get the job done on their own.

Employee suggestion programs don't have to be fancy—a box will do

Too many managers get hung up trying to create a formal “Employee Suggestion Program” where ideas are accepted and considered, appropriate feedback is administered, and employees are rewarded. Those programs are nice—if they ever get off the ground. While you're waiting, try this simple technique: Put a shoe box on the end of your desk, and ask employees to submit ideas—either signed or unsigned. Then, hold a monthly “Idea Meeting” and go through the ideas—praising the good ones and explaining why the other ones wouldn't work.

Test employees before promoting them

As it's unwise to skip over people who are ready to be promoted, it's also unwise to promote people who aren't ready to move up. By doing so, you risk shattering their confidence and forcing them out of the company. (Most employees will leave before they admit they're in over their heads.) Run these tests before you promote anyone: Give candidates projects similar to the ones they'll be doing in their new positions. See how they handle them. Put them in charge of a team to see how they manage people. Make sure they have the skills necessary to succeed at the next level before you move them there.

Keep an eye out for tips of 'discrimination icebergs'

Thousands of managers have been sued for discrimination—without ever realizing that they were doing

anything wrong. Often, the clues were there, but managers failed to see them. Learn to look for little signs that you might be discriminating against certain employees. *Example:* At Dominick's, the number-two person in the deli was always called “Second Deli Man,” no matter what gender they were. No big deal, you say? Standing alone, maybe it isn't. But Dominick's was hit with a class-action suit by 1,500 women, and the “Second Deli Man” evidence was one of the first things testified about in court. Look for the “little” things. They often lead to bigger problems.

A 'preretirement' program can take the sting out of losing key employees

Retirement can be a traumatic experience for employees used to working every day. It can also be traumatic for the company, because of the accumulated knowledge retirees take with them when they leave. Neuville Industries, a N.C.-based hosiery company, has figured out a way to solve both problems. Managers there allow employees, when they hit retirement age, to work part-time for a few years until they retire. The arrangement helps employees because it eases them into retirement. And the company benefits because managers can partner older workers with younger employees through job-share programs, allowing younger employees to soak up years of experience and accumulated knowledge.

It pays to be ethical with your computer software

Managers should be aware that the Business Software Alliance is encouraging downsized or fired employees to turn their bosses in for software viola-

tions, such as illegally sharing software. Managers have already paid thousands of dollars because employees turned them in. Don't jeopardize your company by cutting corners. Purchase all the software your employees need to perform their jobs efficiently.

Sponsor 'fun lunches'

Employees need to blow off steam from time to time. As a manager, you need to provide the opportunity for them to do this. Sponsor a monthly “fun lunch.” Send out groups of employees for a long lunch—on the company. Tell them not to worry about how long they're gone. *There's only one rule:* Nobody is allowed to talk about work. If they talk about work, they have to pay for their own meal. These long lunches will not only relieve stress—they'll also let employees get to know each other better.

Analyze performance problems in-depth before acting

When employees aren't performing up to standards, analyze the situation carefully before making any decisions. If the employee has the skills and ability to do the job, find out what's getting in the way (fear that good performance will lead to more work, for example). If the employee doesn't possess the skills, do a little more digging. Maybe the person had the ability at one time but lost it through lack of opportunity to use it. You may need to rethink what kinds of skills are really necessary to succeed in the position.

—Adapted from “Capability procedures: A good thing?” by Andrew Mayo, in *Training Journal*

Helping workers help the community pays off in many different ways

Companies that encourage and support their employees' efforts to get involved in community work accomplish two goals: 1) They motivate employees, who appreciate the company's efforts; and 2) They solidify the company's good reputation in the community. Here are some ways in which companies use charitable donations to motivate employees and build a good reputation:

- **Levi Strauss.** The jean company donates \$500 to community organizations that an employee has been actively involved in for one year. If an employee sits on the board of a nonprofit organization, Levi donates between \$500 and \$1,500, depending on the size and budget of the organization.
- **McCormick & Company, Inc.** The spice company sponsors an annual "Charity Day." Employees work a Saturday at their favorite charitable organizations, then donate their pay (at a time-and-a-half rate) to the charities. The company matches their salaries dollar for dollar. More than 90 percent of the employees take advantage of the program.

- **ARCO.** The oil company will match two-to-one any employee or retiree donation to a social service organization or college. Also, the company hands out annual community service awards to employees who have made significant contributions to the local community.
- **Westin Hotels.** The company offers Inspirational Awards to employees who both excel at their jobs *and* contribute in some way to the community. All award winners become eligible for the grand prize: a two-week, all-expenses-paid vacation for two at a Westin Hotel, plus \$1,000 in cash.
- **State Farm Insurance.** The company ties sales competitions to charitable organizations. For instance, for every dollar raised in one sales incentive competition, the company gave a certain percentage to the Special Olympics.

—Adapted from *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*, by Bob Nelson (Workman)

a company's soul

If you think of vision and mission as an organization's head and heart, the values it holds are its soul.
—From *Making Common Sense Common Practice*, by Buzzotta/Lefton/Cheney/Beatty (New Leaders Press)



do you know your job?

Eighty percent of American managers cannot answer with any measure of confidence these seemingly simple questions: What is my job? What in it really counts? How well am I doing?

—W. Edwards Deming, quality expert

How to deal with 'problem' workers

Most managers have a few "problem" employees. These employees may not work to their full potential, or they may be too cautious or too slow. As a manager, don't give up on them. Their problems may be easily solved. Here are three tactics to use when faced with this situation:

1. **Stack the deck in their favor.** Many "unproductive" employees simply lack self-confidence. They don't try hard because they're afraid to fail. Assign these employees a project with which you *know* they'll have success. Then assign another. And so on. After each success, offer praise and recognition. Build confidence project by project, until they're ready to take on harder challenges.
2. **Find out if they're afraid of being promoted.** This happens more than you think. Employees don't perform as well as they can because they don't want to move

up—they're afraid of more responsibility and commitment, or they don't want to manage others. These people are to be *treasured*. Expand their responsibilities within their area of expertise. Let them know that you like them where they're at—but you want them to be the best that they can be within their comfort zone.

3. **Separate the behavior from the employee.** Ask yourself: Has the employee always acted this way, or is the behavior something new? If the behavior is not consistent with what you know about the employee, then start looking for deeper reasons. There might be problems at home; maybe depression has set in; it could even be a substance abuse problem. By not performing, they could be sending out a cry for help. Be there for them now, and they'll be there for you later.



At other companies . . .

Flextime is the rule at this bank

Many organizations talk a good game about flexible work/life options, then subtly undermine their own programs. One exception: First Tennessee Bank—Knoxville. Ninety-six percent of the employees at that location work a flexible schedule. Across First Tennessee Bank as a whole, 90 percent of the employees work on flextime arrangements. “It’s a phenomenal percentage,” says Pat Brown, manager of the performance development group for First Tennessee.

—Adapted from “Companies using fresh strategies to retain workers,” by Georgiana Vines, in the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

New Jersey job fair links convicts and employers

Looking for loyal, motivated workers? Check out your local prison. In New Jersey, 45 employers, including grocery store chain QuickChek and chemical maker Jarchem Industries, met with 400 inmates at a job fair sponsored by the Mountainview Youth Correction Facility in Clinton, N.J., earlier this year. To be eligible, prisoners had to be six months from their release date, take part in a class on career awareness, and have a printed résumé. “The experience of meeting these recruiters itself brings a big change in attitude,” says Mountainview educational director Carol Winer. “The offenders say, ‘They’re interested in me, they shook my hand.’ The companies see that these aren’t convict stereotypes hanging from bars and drooling. They’re human beings who deserve a chance.”

—Adapted from “Job fairs assist ex-convicts,” in the *New York Times*

Employee photo montage emphasizes work/life commitment

New hires at zipRealty.com start out by having lunch with the president of the small online real estate brokerage. During the lunch, Scott Kucirek asks them for a set of six to ten photos of family and friends for a montage that hangs on the company’s entrance wall. “We do it because we want people in this company to realize that everyone here has outside interests, friends, and family, and that maintaining a balanced life is very important to the success of the company,” writes Kucirek in *BusinessWeek*.

Companies seek to entice good employees back into the fold

Good-bye isn’t forever when good employees leave. According to studies by Gartner Group and Recruiting Trends, as

many as 60 percent of midsize and large companies routinely rehire their top-performing IT workers and other professionals after they’ve left. Among companies that keep in touch with former workers are Boston consulting firm Bain & Co., which sponsors social events for “alumni” and uses a newsletter to maintain close contact. Another consulting firm, McKinsey, makes a practice of keeping former workers informed about upcoming projects and job openings.

—Adapted from “My boomerang just came back,” by Jane Lommel, on the Brave New Work World Web site

New hires check out firm before Day One

The orientation starts *before* the first day for new employees at Pinnacle Decision Systems, Inc., a consulting and software development firm in Middletown, Conn. When hired, new personnel are given the URL for Pinnacle’s employee intranet, called simply “HQ.” They can do everything from check out the company’s policies and procedures to order business cards and T-shirts. A virtual lounge lets them “meet” their new colleagues. In a rapidly growing company like Pinnacle, everything that can ease the transition of a new hire is a bonus.

Dreadlocks spark religious lawsuit

Asking a job candidate to get a haircut could infringe on his or her religious freedom, as in the case of a recent lawsuit settlement by Greyhound Lines. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission filed suit on behalf of Kevan Sheppard, a practitioner of the Rastafarian religion, who applied for a bus-driving job in 1998. He had experience and appropriate licenses, and underwent a physical exam, an aptitude test, and a drug test. But when a supervisor asked if he’d be willing to cut his long dreadlocks, Sheppard replied that a haircut would go against his religion. He was subsequently turned down for the job, and the EEOC found that applicants hired in his place had less experience and qualifications. Greyhound settled the case for \$33,500 in January, and agreed to train personnel involved in hiring about employment discrimination laws, and to distribute information on antidiscrimination policies as well as complaint procedures to its workforce.

—Adapted from “Greyhound pays in bias case over dreadlocks,” in the *Buffalo News*

Fight burnout by treating these symptoms

You can't lead a team very effectively if you're burnt out. The symptoms aren't always obvious, but if you pay attention to your feelings and behavior, you'll be able to treat the problem before it gets out of control. Here's what to look for, and what to do:

- **Fatigue/exhaustion.** If you find yourself often feeling worn out and tired, take a look at how much rest and exercise you're getting. Be sure to schedule enough time in your day to take care of yourself physically.
- **Emotional exhaustion.** If you notice that you don't have the enthusiasm or drive that you once had, or that you don't even have the energy to get angry when it's appropriate, you probably need to take some kind of break to replenish your emotional reserves. If you can't take a lengthy vacation, try spending some time away from work doing things that are meaningful to you—listening to music, being outdoors, visiting an art museum.

- **Isolation from other people.** Do you find that you're not paying attention to the accomplishments of those around you, especially people who expect you to provide advice and leadership? Make a point of looking for their positive achievements and praising them for their contributions to the organization.
- **Feelings of being unappreciated.** When your own efforts aren't recognized or appreciated, your personal morale will suffer. Look for ways to share news of your contributions with people who ought to know.
- **Obsession.** If you find yourself becoming too focused on a single project or area of your work, force yourself to take a break and do something different to restore your balance.

—Adapted from “The secret to motivating yourself and others,” by Susan Rempel, on the WCS Web site

it's never too late

No matter how far you have gone on a wrong road, turn back.
—Turkish proverb



think long term

Expedients are for the hour; principles for the ages.
—H. W. Beecher, clergyman

Tailor your communication style to fit employees' personalities

We all have different personal communication styles. The better you can recognize and understand them, the more effective you'll be in your leadership role. Here are four basic styles to look for:

- **Direct.** These people are focused on results. They want other people to get to the point, and quickly. They grow impatient with too much chitchat or beating around the bush. Chances are their workplaces are very well organized and uncluttered. You'll communicate most effectively by going straight to the basic message without delay.
- **Relationship-oriented.** Some people are driven to connect with others on a personal basis. They're always ready to talk about their family and friends and ask you about yours. They know lots of people around the organization and usually know what's going on better than anyone else. Take some time to get friendly with these people; learn about their families and personal history.

You'll form a bond that will help you communicate smoothly when it comes to business matters.

- **Analyzer.** These folks rely on facts and data to make decisions. They'll listen if you can provide detailed, logic-driven information supporting your point. One good strategy: Give them a few pages of statistics and other data to look over on their own so they can convince themselves that your ideas are workable.
 - **Enthusiastic.** Turned on by new ideas and interesting challenges, these people can get very involved in what they're talking about, using physical gestures and dramatic figures of speech. Talk about the big picture to get their energy up; don't drown them in excessive details.
- Adapted from “Communicate with others the way they communicate best,” by Carolyn B. Thompson and Robin Vance, on the Training Systems Inc. Web site



A matter of principle

Two years ago, Cole took a new job as a senior manager at a large manufacturing company. Like many high-level managers, when he came in he hired colleagues he knew from previous jobs to fill the middle manager positions in his department. Moira was one such manager. Moira and Cole had worked together for five years at a previous company, and Cole considered her to be a friend.

Recently, Moira came to Cole with a problem. One of the people she inherited when she was hired, Ned, wasn't "pulling his weight," according to Moira. She felt as if he "just isn't there for me, or for the company."

Before greenlighting a termination, Cole met with Ned. After talking to him, reviewing his time sheets and project records, and conducting a discreet inquiry within the department, a different picture began to emerge. Ned was putting in 60-hour weeks; he had worked extensively on projects for which Moira had received all the credit; he covered for Moira when her mistakes had almost cost the company clients; he always came in under budget—even though Moira's department as a whole was consistently *over* budget.

When all the facts came to light, Cole realized without a doubt that the problem was not Ned. It was Moira.

The obvious thing would be to confront Moira. However, Cole knows Moira well enough to realize that if he "takes Ned's side," she is the kind of person who may blow up and draw a line in the sand: "him or me."

To make matters worse, Cole has his two-year review coming up, and he's in line for a vice presidency. Since he lobbied to bring Moira in, if he lets her go (or if she walks) it's going to look bad on his record. In fact, if any of this comes to light it's going to hurt his chance for the vice president's slot.

What would you do? Fax your comments to our editors at 312.960.4105, Attn: Matter of Principle; send an e-mail to lfr@ragan.com, Subject: Matter of Principle.

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Look for two traits among key employees

Your employee retention efforts should be selective: Your objective is to retain the best people on your team. But how do you identify them? Lots of key traits can't be quantified. In any work group, though, the most valuable people will share two important characteristics: They are good team players, ready and able to support the team's goals above their personal objectives; and they make people around them look better by teaching, coaching, and supporting their work.

—Adapted from *Keeping the People Who Keep You in Business*, by Leigh Branham (AMACOM)

Job rotation may improve ethical behavior

One positive benefit of job rotation may be that employees experience fewer ethical lapses. Many moral errors occur when people simply do the same thing they've always done, or respond to a routine situation without trying to think of alternatives because they've gotten used to dealing with it in a particular way. But people new on a job won't have that kind of "script" to rely on, and may be more sensitive to ethical dilemmas that others might not recognize. See if cross-training or job rotation helps your people make better ethical decisions.

—Adapted from "When good people do bad things at work," by Dennis Moberg, on the Markula Center for Applied Ethics Web site

Invite spouses to meetings

If your company holds regular meetings where employees can ask questions of top management, encourage employees to bring their spouses or

partners. Inland Steel of Chicago does this, and many workers take advantage of it. It demonstrates a significant message: "We realize how important your family is to you, and they are important to the company as well."

Use a sliding scale for referral rewards

Whatever happens to the economy, the search for good workers will always be a priority for any leader. You could find your best ally in your own workforce. Rewarding current employees for referrals can help your recruiting efforts, but how should your reward program be structured?

Many companies use a three-tier system: A cash award—say, \$250—for referrals that lead to the hiring of nonexempt (hourly) employees; a higher one—\$500 for example—for salaried workers; and a third—perhaps \$1,000—for employees in key hard-to-fill positions. Remember, too, that your rewards don't have to be in cash: DVD players, cell phones, gift certificates, discounts on goods or services, and other noncash alternatives may be appealing to your workers.

—Adapted from "Employee referral Q&A" on the Brain Buzz Web site

Draw up a contract to get more from training

Get the maximum return on your training investment by spelling out your expectations in a contract. Specify such points as how you expect employees to apply what they learn, how employees will share their new knowledge with the rest of your team, and what employees need from you to put the training into action.

—Adapted from "Getting value from training," by Robert Bacal, on the Work 911 Web site

Keep teams in the same time zone

When your team is scattered across different time zones, coordinating your efforts can be tricky. One way to keep everyone on track is to agree on a "Team Standard Time." In the U.S., for example, TST might be Central Time, and workers on the East and West Coasts would use that system when communicating with each other: "We'll hold a teleconference at 2:00 Team Central Time," for example. It doesn't matter which zone you use as long as everyone works from the same standard.

—Adapted from the Mill Pond Group Web site

Probe new managers for work/life attitudes

You may be committed to work/life balance, but how can you be sure the people you hire share your concern for the issue? This question becomes especially critical when you're hiring supervisors and managers. Here are some hypothetical situations to explore during interviews:

• "What might you do if a key member of your team asked for a different work schedule to be home when his or her child gets out of school?"

• "How would you respond if an employee asked to telecommute in order to be available to help an elderly relative?"

• "What action would you take if you overheard an employee complaining about a coworker's flexible schedule?"
—Adapted from "Tip of the month for March," by Susan Seitel, on the Work & Family Connection Web site