



Why let employees continually shoot themselves in the feet?

By DR. LARRY COLE

Employees have told me they would not shoot themselves in the feet tonight if they wanted to participate in and win a foot race in the morning. First, the act would result in physical pain that is not enjoyable and second, it would interfere with running. Knowing this leads to the looming question: Why allow employees to continually engage in behaviors that could derail or have adverse consequences on their careers, i.e., shooting themselves in the feet.

Let me tell you about a young man recognized as being extremely intelligent and technically talented. The dealership was lucky because the individual wanted to return home. He has been working at the dealership for a couple of years and the issue that surrounds him is no one likes him. He is brash, arrogant, readily offers his opinions regardless of the subject, becomes frustrated when others fail to quickly accept his opinions, and complains the dealership's practices are antiquated compared to the dealership that he recently left.

Hold on, it gets worse. So, I asked his two upline supervisors, "Who is mentoring this young man?" The answer was shocking... no one. I offered to discuss the precarious situation with the employee and was told, "We'll have to think about it." Why allow this employee to dig a hole so deep that he may never be able to get out of it?

As I'm writing this article, I'm reminded of the service manager who hasn't received a performance evaluation during the five years of his employment. He assumed that since no one has talked to him he's doing okay. The truth is he is not. He has the reputation of having a negative attitude, being a constant complainer and failing to cooperate with other departments.

Every organization has employee issues. Throughout the years, I've addressed hygiene issues, told parents to pay an adult child to stay home, and encouraged professional dress of both men and women (people need to understand that physical appearance is still important). However, the most sensitive issue was talking to a CEO and his attractive human resources manager (who was married) that their public display of affection would be more appropriately conducted in private.

Enough gloom and doom, let's address a happy story. I received a call from a corporate manager who, along with a store manager, was blindsided by recent employee complaints about their authoritarian manager who micromanaged, "bossed" employees around, was threatening, and seemed to demean women employees.

Unfortunately, the two upline managers assumed all was well with this manager who talked a great game about employee engagement and even conducted employee surveys to gauge employee satisfaction. Now for the *faux pas*: The upline managers never reviewed the data with the manager in question or how he was putting the data to work.

To make a long story short, another survey was completed that supported the employees' complaints. Here comes the good news. The manager in question readily accepted the fact that he needed to improve employee relations. We developed a list of strategies designed to improve these working relationships. While putting this article together, I received an email that the manager is doing very well. Success.

The moral of these different scenarios is that the first two allowed their situations to continue unabated and life got worse for everyone. In the third scenario, managers took action as soon as they learned about the issues. Yes, I could argue they should have been more diligent and reviewed the previous engagement surveys, but they wanted to save a technically competent manager and improve working relationships within the store.

Without a doubt, as a manager you will be confronted with sticky personnel issues and you will make a choice: 1) work to help the employee change their behavior, or 2) allow it to continue that will undoubtedly have an adverse impact upon employee morale and production.

Employees in WEDA's classes tell me that fear of conflict is a primary reason that supervisors are reluctant to provide real-time feedback to improve performance. Many people fail to understand that the fear of conflict is created by their imagination.

Fear lives rent free in our minds. Fear plays many roles in our lives and perhaps that ought to be a subject of a future article. One role is making mountains out of molehills. Providing

performance feedback is a lot easier than you may think.

A talented manager I once had the privilege to work with had what she called "ugly baby" conversations and that is how she initiated discussions. She provided excellent real-time feedback.

Action steps to consider

Let's review a few action steps that you can take to create a teaching moment to effectively work with personnel issues.

1. Your Job. A supervisor's responsibility is to do whatever is needed to help their employees succeed within the dealership. Thus, supervisors need to practice with the intent to become a "professional" at providing feedback.

2. Valued. Make certain your employees know they are valued. If there is any doubt, begin with a conversation by reminding employees they are valued team members; that this teaching moment is to help them maximize their performance.

3. Expectations. Set the expectations that real-time feedback will be delivered as an integral component of the dealership's talent development process.

4. Encourage Feedback. Develop the habit of asking your people for ideas to improve operations as well as your performance as their supervisor. An effective leadership tool is to put that feedback to work so your people can see that you are serious.

5. Courage. Leaders need to become comfortable with being uncomfortable and the only way to make that which is uncomfortable comfortable is to practice. Establish a routine to provide feedback to help employees to improve their performance.

Soon you will find yourself enjoying your number one responsibility to help others succeed. Let me close with this: *Developing talent is the number one predictor as to when an individual is ready for advancement.* **WED**



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