



Successful Supervisor Part 78

Trust and the Development of People

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

There are many things supervisors need to do to build a culture of high trust. One important concept is to continually develop their people. When people see a pathway to higher capability, their work is more interesting and rewarding. They trust their supervisor to improve their lot in life by making them more valuable to the organization.

They recognize the company's investment in growing them, and they look to return the favor by investing themselves further into their work. There is a solid correlation between development of people and the level of trust an organization can achieve with the work force. Development of people also creates low employee turnover because employees are happier.

Cross training is one of the easiest ways to develop people. Here are some of the benefits of a good cross training program.

Improved Bench Strength

Every time an employee is out for an illness or vacation, it is a simple matter of moving people around to cover the lost function. Having several back-ups for each position generates the flexibility to operate efficiently in today's frenetic environment.

Better Teamwork

When people train others on their function, a kind of personal bond is struck that is intangible but powerful. It is really a large teambuilding effort to install a cross training program in a company. People actually enjoy it and rightfully feel the additional skills have something to do with job security. Interestingly, in organizations that do not cross train, many people are protective of their knowledge thinking that being the only one who knows procedures makes them appear to be indispensable.

Reduction in Turn Over

An organization that focuses on cross-training suffers less from employee churn. Why? Because people have more variety of work and higher self esteem. They have more fun at work and tend to stay with the organization. Also, the opportunities to learn new

things add to the equation. Basically, people operate at higher levels on Maslow's pyramid in organizations that cross train.

Leads to Higher Trust

Trust is directly related to how people feel about their development. In organizations where people have a solid training program for the future, people know their supervisor cares about them as individuals. The discussions to develop the plan are trust-building events because the topic is how the individual can improve his or her lot in life.

Not Expensive

Of all the ways an organization can improve employee skills, cross-training is the least expensive. Reason: Training can be inserted during the little slack periods within the operating day. Training keeps people occupied in growth activities when there is little else to do. The real cost to the organization is much lower than it appears on the surface. When compared to the benefits, the ROI is fantastic.

Keeps the Saw Sharp

The best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else. This is because in order to explain what you are doing, you have to understand it very well. Also, in the process of training someone else, the trainee may suggest better ways of approaching a task, so the process is being honed and refined all the time.

If your organization does not have an active and specific cross-training process, get one started. It generates many advantages and no significant disadvantages. If you have a program, ask yourself if it is fresh and vital. Are you milking this technique well or giving it lip service?

Benchmark Example

Wegmans is a grocery chain in the northeast United States that is based in Rochester, NY. This private organization has been on the list of top 100 companies to work for in America every year since 1998, often scoring in the top 10, and won the top slot in 2005. I am familiar with this company because I live in Rochester.

They have worked for years on developing a culture of high trust. They do this through numerous methods championed by their late founder, Robert Wegman. One hallmark of Wegmans is that they are fanatical about the development of people. It is not the only underpinning of their culture, but it is an obvious pillar of why they are so successful. As a result, they have extremely low employee turnover: significantly lower than 10% percent in an industry that normally suffers high turnover of about 40% per year.

Take stock of how much development you are doing in your organization. The best companies spend more than \$1500 per employee and provide more than 50 hours of training each year. If you are doing less, think about increasing that amount.

Trust and development of people go hand in hand. Companies that stress development normally enjoy higher trust, which translates into much better performance. It is one of the hallmarks of an excellent organization.

This is a part in a series of articles on “Successful Supervision.” The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

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