Brown Bagger

This section is set up to provide a ready-made Brown Bag Session for you to use with employees and/or managers. Use as is, or adapt this information for a general employee group. You may reproduce as many copies as needed.

Teamwork
The Importance of Leading, Relating & Communicating

By Kathy Cox

Regardless of the business, success relies around an important component: *teamwork*. And as a business leader for a number of years, I can say without hesitation that creating a healthy, well-balanced team starts with the leader. Regardless of whether the person's title is "director", "manager" or something else, a workplace leader cannot expect anything from his or her work team that he or she is not willing to give of himself/herself.

I personally believe that there are "leadership" qualities in all of us. However, for various reasons some individuals will never see themselves as a leader. The way I see it, every day we should be growing and learning new things, and as we grow and learn we begin to assume responsibilities and attain greater maturity in our lives.

Our mindset plays a tremendous role in success. Noted author and leader John C. Maxwell states, "Change is inevitable; growth is optional." Ken Blanchard, co-author of *The One Minute Manager* adds, "If you want to go places you've never been before, you have to think in ways you've never thought before."

We will revisit the importance of having a good attitude later in this article, but first are some additional recommendations about leadership (notice how they all focus on relationships):

❖ *Forget monetary incentives – focus on people*. Even if your organization *could* afford bigger salaries, benefits, and other perks; they won't increase greater loyalty from staff members. They only tie people to an organization in the same way that a person trains a dog to stay in the yard – the dog will stay there, *until* someone across the street offers a bigger, juicier bone. On the other hand, creating a culture in which relationships are valued gives employees a more profound and rewarding reason to come to work each day. Effective leaders recognize that it's only through relationships that people can change and grow – and personal growth is a requirement for survival in an increasingly complex world.

❖ *Provide honest, caring feedback*. Effective leaders continually ask staff members how they are doing. Sometimes feedback will be negative in nature. Honest feedback can be painful for both parties, but it is the backbone of a growth organization. A relationship without honest feedback is a "mutual toleration society" that stifles growth and change. Caring is vital. As John Maxwell put it, "*People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.*"

❖ *Practice the art of self-disclosure*. Feedback works both ways. Leaders want staff to provide *them* with feedback, but this works better if the manager practices self-disclosure. If you want to turn a stagnant staff relationship into a growth-oriented one – or start a new relationship off on the right foot – the leader needs to share *his or her* feelings *first*. This is risky because the person in charge doesn't know how the person will respond. However, it's a risk worth taking because a leader can learn a lot from staff members. Self-disclose often enough, and you will teach by example the types of relationships you expect to flourish in your workplace.

❖ *Recognize that conflict is not a bad thing*. Morrie Shechtman, author of *Fifth Wave Leadership; the Internal Frontier* points out that constructive criticism and conflict are actually good for an organization because they can lead to positive changes. It's only when staff members

squabble and point fingers over issues that conflict becomes negative. The key is to remain focused on the big picture, and not nit-pick over details. The purpose of a workplace is not to make everyone happy – it's to grow people to their maximum potential. Conflict and confrontation, while rarely pleasant, are actually the very definition of teamwork. "*They are a necessary part of growth relationships*," Shechtman says.

❖ *Respect each other enough to talk about it*. Don't keep upset feelings to oneself or just vent them to someone else. Talk to the person about the issue. "We have a saying … that if it's a big enough issue to be a problem, be a big enough person to talk about it," says Donna Stafford, a credentialed trainer and consultant. It's true that allowing people to speak their minds can temporarily increase the level of conflict. That's OK. You have to get through the conflict to find the solution.

❖ *Recognize that effective relationships help the short term*. The actions described in this section are almost certain to help your organization as a whole. After all, people who are personally and professionally fulfilled make better employees. This reason alone is sufficient for a leader to foster a growth-oriented workplace. However, the even bigger reason has more to do with tomorrow than today.

❖ *Realize that good relationships enhance the long term*. Creating a work environment rich with opportunities for self-discovery is an investment in the future. It's seldom easy, but it's one that an effective leader is willing to take in order to attract and retain talented employees. Leaders that focus on actions like these will have staff members less likely to leave for greener pastures. That's because the organization is meeting needs more important and compelling than just a paycheck.

Positive Thinking & Teamwork

A good team is made up of individuals that have a positive attitude, and leaders that put recommendations like the ones explained previously into practice, and are likely to have staff members

with healthy mindsets. John Maxwell offers his "Seven Steps to Success":

1. Make a commitment to grow daily.
2. Value the process more than events.
3. Don't wait for inspiration.
4. Be willing to sacrifice pleasure for opportunity.
5. Dream big.
6. Plan your priorities.
7. Give up to go up!

> "The purpose of a workplace is not to make everyone happy – it's to grow people to their maximum potential. Conflict and confrontation, while rarely pleasant, are actually the very definition of teamwork."

The following are some key traits of good team players:

❖ **They are positive about themselves and others**. They have an "I can do it" attitude and don't limit themselves when it comes to learning new things. Positive people have a positive influence on a team.

❖ **They know how to respond in a given situation**. They see a need and act *before* the leader points it out. They truly want to make a difference in their surroundings for the well being of all involved.

❖ **They have a number of positive characteristics**. These include: dedication, compassion, humility, and determination. Although not everyone will be strong in each and every particular quality, a team draws its strength from each individual. As a whole, they are likely to exhibit all of these traits.

❖ **They see the big picture**. By now it's clear that successful thinking and teamwork go hand in hand.

Even when disagreements come into play, a quality team is willing to forsake its own agenda for the good of the team. Once the team has completed the task at hand, they can discuss new and better ways of achieving goals in the future. When everyone is experiencing personal growth, the team is heading in the right direction.

Leadership & Teamwork

Effective leaders recognize that calling staff members a "team" does not make this a reality. *Continual* emphasis helps a lot. At our facility, we stress the importance of teamwork quite often – even to the point of discussing teamwork with applicants during interviews. Actions do speaker louder than words, and applying this principle makes for a positive team.

A Failure to Communicate

How does leadership and teamwork tie in to communication? It stands to reason that a leader that leads well, and staff members that work together well, are often the result of leaders and staff that *communicate* effectively. But how do they get to that point? The fact remains that communication is an elusive concept in many workplaces – enough that it warrants discussion separate from other key concepts in this article.

"Communication is probably the most overused, but least understood term in any organization," states Dennis Vicars, an executive program director. Vicars points out that staff members frequently lament that either management doesn't listen to them, or that no one told them about a specific procedure, rule, etc.

"However, complaints about lack of communication are too often made by people prone to talking and telling instead of listening and learning," adds Vicars in the article, *What we seem to have here is a failure to communicate*…. "To truly communicate, one has a responsibility to find out what the other party really wants or hopes to achieve. Once this is accomplished, then and only then can you communicate from a position of strength." The following are additional ideas from Vicars for enhancing communication:

- When a person asks a question, let him or her finish even if you know what they are going to ask.

- Demonstrate to the other person that you are listening by focusing your eyes and body language in a positive and open manner.

- Listen to the 'music' of the message, as well as the words.

- Show concern and empathy.

- Be willing to repeat, in positive terms, what you think you have heard the person say.

- Give the speaker validation that you understand his or her message or request.

Vicars also points out that *acting* on a person's request is not the same thing as *listening* to a person's request. On the one hand, truly listening to someone means that his or her opinions or ideas are valued. Conversely, listening to an individual doesn't mean that this person is going to get his or her way, either.

"It simply means that rejection is a part of communication as well," Vicars writes. In a team-oriented atmosphere, everyone is allowed to voice his or her suggestions. "However, not being acted upon is not the same as not being heard," Vicars says.

Summary

Teams are made up of a group of people. All attitudes and decisions should be geared toward the success of everyone involved in the child's well being. Remember that there is no "I" in teamwork.
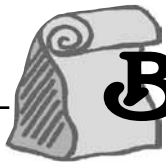
Effective Communication with Employees

Effective communication shows that you care about your employees. The following are several recommendations for managers to improve communications with staff members:

❖ *Communicate regularly.* Keep lines of communication open! Utilize communication tools, such as postings or blogs on company intranets, and print or electronic newsletters that provide regular updates on promotions, work anniversaries, and friendly, personable gestures such as pictures of family members. Also, offer regular meetings that allow staff members and their superiors to interact, air concerns, etc.

❖ *Carry on conversations on a regular basis.* Don't be afraid to engage in idle chit-chat with employees. Even better, take an interest in their families and their concerns. We're not talking about being nosy or pushy, but being warm, caring, and personable. Such conversations go a long way toward building better employer-employee relationships.

❖ *Really listen.* Sometimes we all just want to be heard. Whatever the problem, it's important to truly listen to the other person and try to understand his/her point of view. If the employee does not pick a good time to talk, be honest and let the individual know it'd be better if you could discuss the matter another time, so that you're really able to focus on his/her concerns.

❖ *Take concerns seriously.* Demonstrate that you will not disregard an employee's concerns, and explain how you or another superior (and/or your EAP) will address them. Try to find a solution that works for everyone. Even when talking about difficult situations or topics, focus on the positives. This will make it easier for employees to work with their superiors to arrive at a resolution.

Source: Kathy Cox.