USING CONTROL… FOR EFFECTIVE RESULTS

When managers capture the hearts and minds of employees, they are more likely to stay for a while! One of the repeated themes in articles about retaining staff is that people are motivated less by money than most of us assume. Instead, challenging work, getting recognition for their efforts and achievements, alongside great co-workers, excites them. Also, important is freedom from the unnecessary scrutiny of intrusive bosses.

Excessive control is the flipside of the issue discussed in *Loosing Control is Bad For Business*. Senior managers, who are too involved in day-to-day operations, create an environment antithetical to the one needed today. Micromanaging, or too much management control, can cause major negative consequences that undermine business vitality and success. Some of these are:

- The independence of the workforce is stifled.
- The development of future leaders is thwarted.
- New ideas, approaches, and creativity are limited.
- Turnover rates are higher than desirable.

Experiencing even one of these negative organizational outcomes is deadly!

What does too much management control look like?

One example is a large financial services company. Joe was the manager of a technical unit that served the corporate office. He was a long-term employee, had been promoted numerous times, and had been in his current role for several years. It seemed clear that this position was his last advancement. Meeting Joe, one had the impression of a good man, but one who was running scared. The pace of change had increased in the last two years, in part because of a new senior management team. Joe was overwhelmed and the way he coped was by controlling others.

Joe's group was comprised of 36 people, many of whom had been at the firm for more than 3 years; several had long company service. Each year senior management required substantial reporting from this technical unit as a precursor to the annual budgeting process. Each year it was done exactly the same way, word for word, because Joe believed that the managers would not accept any other approach. So at the end of third quarter Joe began his tirade. He hovered, nit-picked, criticized, and shut off any discussion of alternative analyses, or presentation style. He drove the group crazy and monopolized their time so that important other work was either left undone, or needed to be completed way after hours. You get the picture.

What was the result of Joe's micromanaging? Every year the veterans complained, got further demoralized, and produced the same old report. They even stopped considering or recommending alternative ideas. No innovative suggestions emerged during the process, because they knew that Joe would not tolerate change. Improvement was non-existent. Each year newer people got frustrated, and quit the group. Some transferred to other departments; most left the company. Talk about brain drain!

Another example further demonstrates the case of too much management control. Smith & Associates was a professional services firm, established twelve years ago. Its founder, Natalie Smith was a charismatic leader, highly intelligent, very strong technically, engaging with clients, a caring and respectful person, and incredibly focused on details. She believed that her attention to both the strategic and fine points set the firm apart and made it a success. The problem was that while Natalie was passionate about the firm's work, she was involved in every assignment, and was frustrated that project managers were not stepping up to take on additional responsibilities. She felt (accurately) that no one put in the time she did. She was ready for new challenges, but was giving mixed messages to senior professionals in the firm. On one hand, she said she was interested in their growth and assumption of principal-in-charge roles on projects. On the other, she rarely missed a client or team meeting, was always present at new business sessions, often told staff members how to proceed on a proposal or job, and saw employees with narrow vs. broad ranging skills, essentially as they performed years ago.

The repercussions of Natalie's controlling behaviors were both subtle and overt. Discussions with senior professionals demonstrated conflicted feelings of frustration and admiration. These conversations were filled with comments about Natalie impressive talents, and how difficult it was to challenge her or grow under her spotlight. Since Smith & Associates was a good and comfortable place to work, all but the most aggressive remained. But the loss of employee creativity, vitality, and expansion beyond the founder's considerable skills, were undermining the firm's future.

What can we learn from these examples? How can we translate these lessons into our businesses? Four suggestions will help.

1. Get an objective assessment of your management behavior that is based on interviews with staff members, and clients or customers. Why would you do this? The more senior we are in an organization, the less candid is the feedback we get. So, getting an objective assessment that outlines specific strengths and areas for improvement is very valuable.
2. Articulate your personal values and goals in a clear, succinct paragraph. Evaluate if you are managing with these values and goals as your guideposts.
3. Determine three specific attitudes and behaviors you demonstrate (learned from the assessment) that *enable* the growth, creativity, and independence of others. Focus on them. Leverage them.
4. Decide which three attitudes and behaviors you exhibit (learned from the

assessment) that *deter* the growth, creativity, and independence of others. Concentrate on minimizing them.

Companies need all the talent available to them. As business leaders we need to create an environment where ideas flow freely, where openness to the new and untried is available, where stretching people is the norm, where flexibility is revered. Too much control will undermine these necessary organizational characteristics. Micromanaging will not help you capture the heart of minds of your employees. For effective results, it is essential to use the right amount of management control.

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