



MANAGEMENT STYLE

Is it possible to find a better illustration of the worst in power techniques and old management style than Jesse Helms? Watching him in action is seeing an anachronism. But, as bad as it is to observe him, can you imagine what it would be like to experience his capricious, irrational, and immovable beliefs and behaviors? Someone could design a sit-com about this guy!

In 1997, Senator Helms let loose his eccentricities on Bill Weld, the former governor of Massachusetts. But, this article is not about whether we agree or not with the Senator's position. Rather, that his style is a perfect example of what won't work in organizations today. Unfortunately, there are more than a few behavioral clones of Helms in positions of authority; so, this piece is more than rhetoric.

What specifically is note worthy about the Helms' style, and what about it is illustrative of some managers today?

- *They proclaim edicts.* When such individuals speak, they act as though everyone had been waiting for their opinions.
- *They are intransigent.* Compromise for them is an impossible characteristic because it implies weakness... or shared power.
- *They don't listen to reasoned arguments.* Their position seems to be, why let further study hamper decision-making? Why allow knowledgeable colleagues the opportunity to articulate their ideas and thus, influence process and results?

And, what are the characteristics of more enlightened managers? The following are four distinguishing attributes:

- **They are inquisitive.** New managers ask a lot of questions. However, they ask them not as a control ploy or because they are caught up in minutiae, but because they are curious and understand the need to always be listening to others. They talk to customers and to the employees who are most directly in touch with them.
- **They are reflective** and see this as a way to learn from the past, integrate the realities of the present, and get a perspective for the future. Thus, they use the information they gather.
- **They help others to think** by encouraging them to articulate their opinions, ideas, and reactions. They understand that there is no better way to clarify your thoughts than by explaining yourself to another person.
- **They facilitate connections** between people, groups, divisions, and companies. They act as linkages or liaisons themselves and set up organizations that require the sharing of information, and often employees as well.

Most forward-looking managers are flexible and understand that it doesn't matter how smart they are, or how knowledgeable about their company, or how great a product or service they have to sell today. No one predicts the future.

The best they can do for their organization is to develop and nurture an environment that is nimble and light on its feet, embraces new thinking, is open to learning, has a

broad perspective on the world, and is a good place to work. No small feat, but it is the culture that will best succeed in the future.

Whichever end of this management style continuum you identify with, know that it has important implications for your company... today and tomorrow.

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