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Thursday, March 18, 2010

Control is Overrated

Posted by Mark Brousseau

Out of control? When it comes to management, "Out of Control" is a compliment. Siamak Farah, director and CEO of InfoStreet (www.infostreet.com) explains:

It may seem counter-intuitive, but the more you control, the less you will succeed. In other words, unless you let go, you won't grow.

Especially in small business environments, there is a general feeling that if management does not keep it all in check, the business will fall apart. For a moment, let's assume that this theory is true. By this definition, the more management controls, the better work gets done.

Expanding further, it then behooves us to give management control of everything to ensure it is done the best it can be done. Now, we have just bound the growth of the company to the availability of management. Since the hours of the day are limited, the growth of the company is now limited. Therein lies the fundamental flaw in "control by management".

If management liberates itself from control it can then be free to think of larger plans. After all, presumably the reason you are in a management position is that you have experience.

Experience can not only create competitive advantages, but it can also avoid costly mistakes. In business, as in sports, wins often come from not making mistakes. Yet, when in the trenches, even the most experienced can make mistakes since they are not sufficiently removed from the process to clearly see the obstacles. This is precisely why even the best players in the world have coaches.

Be a Coach, Not a Player

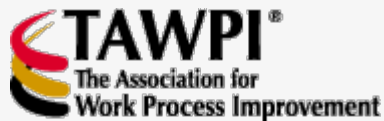
Throughout our business lives, we have all heard the advice: "delegate, delegate, delegate". But often this great advice is shrugged off with "I wish I could", "Don't have the talent", "We are under-resourced", "It's too risky at our size", and similar rationalization. Yet, the truth is that by delegation you will get more done with better quality, have a happier team, and the quality of your business and your business life will increase at least ten-fold.

Some are fortunate enough that they can afford great talent, therefore delegation seems like a no-brainer. However, delegation is an acquired skill for most. Those who don't have it will try to micromanage even the best talent, rendering it virtually ineffective.

On the other hand, some may overcompensate for previous micromanagement and completely wash their hands off of the tasks at hand. That, in the words of my friend Allen Hargreaves, is abdication and not delegation.

Delegation is about letting the person closest to the problem solve the problem, and you, the management, being there in support of them, not to monitor them. You have to be there, side-by-side and close enough to share your experience, but

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far enough that the work is done by the delegatee and they receive ALL the credit for it.

Developing Delegates

A great psychiatrist friend of mine once told me that counseling is ineffective. It amounts to giving advice, in one ear and out the other. By contrast, with therapy, the psychiatrists often know the answers, but never share it with the patient. They just ask questions leading the patient down the path so they themselves can reach the right conclusions. That experience will never be forgotten, and thereafter, the patient will always take the right steps.

Management coaching should also be very similar to the therapy approach. Using this model, you can empower the best talent to be better. You can also take even the least experienced, and turn them into the most valuable team members. This approach can allow you to hire out of college, and in no time compete very effectively with those who are paying much higher salaries.

Control has its place

As you may have seen in my other posts, patience is running thin in today's work environment. Impatient people are often short with others, especially with those that are in the learning phase, or simply did not see a problem the way others viewed it.

This is where control has its value. Regardless of how frustrated, outraged, or peeved you are, you need to be in control of your emotions. This is even more important for leaders who are coaching, teaching, and sharing their experience on a daily basis.

Remember the rule on controlling emotions: In any given exchange, regardless of the position one holds, the one who loses their temper has lost. The damage might seem temporary, but I can assure you it is not.

People often don't remember details of events, but they do remember how they felt at the event. Therefore an event in which you have shown frustration - or worse yet, anger - will be forever be remembered in a negative light, diminishing your value as a leader or a team player.

Manage Processes Not People

In the 1930s, when talking about black empowerment, Marian Anderson was credited with a quote which truly applies to today's business environment. She said:

"As long as you keep a person down, some part of you has to be down there to hold him down, so it means that you cannot soar as you otherwise might."

So let go of controlling people today, and focus on creating processes, strategies, and competitive advantages. When you create processes, people can follow them with minimal guidance. As a result, you get controlled quality without having to control people.

This is the formula for growth. Let go, so you can grow.

What do you think?

Posted by Mark Brousseau at 7:01 PM

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