

# July 2008

By Richard Hohmann

Today, I sat in a management meeting observing the dynamics of the meeting and watching the body language of the participants for an hour and a half. It is important when I am coaching executives that I observe the environments that can make a difference. It became evident that most of the managers in that meeting have not been told how their performance brings value to the organization and as a result they rarely pass on the value message to their employees. Employee appreciation is not new but understanding the value to the organization may be new to some. Concerns about communication, accountability, responsibility, and collaboration were expressed in one form or another by almost everyone around the table. The facilitator was particularly good today with his fairness and recognition of the other manager's contributions to the overall success of the organization but I left with the feeling that his hands were tied in terms of getting the desired results.

It was important for all of them to realize that communication is a key element in getting people to understand what they can do to contribute to the success of the organization. At this meeting, there could have been more concrete objectives, more story-telling, more real-life examples, etc. but the defined need was to take responsibility for taking action. A commitment to take an action that may change this environment to a more positive experience.

I now know why there is no question why we call them middle managers. Middle management needs to listen to the senior or executive leadership team and while being responsive to the rest of the employees. As we know this listening and implementing position, AKA middle management, has always been the buffer between the top and the bottom. This is why middle management is often called the "glue" that binds the top to the bottom, much like an Oreo cookie.

It is my opinion that middle management is the one component that cannot be overlooked. Unfortunately, companies continue to put these positions in jeopardy when the economic climate turns cold. Middle managers continue to be the implementers of the strategy and policy. Middle managers are the change initiators. If change is not managed well, it has been shown that employee engagement never happens and low morale starts rearing its ugly head.

## Middle Managers are the Implementers



It is my opinion that when external factors become evident and competition gets more aggressive, it is time to focus on the middle management and make sure that we are meeting their needs. Remember, middle management is the layer that attracts, retains, and develops top performers. Let's not let the normal knee-jerk reaction occur when times get tough. Let's focus on what we can do to develop our middle management team and allow them to implement the changes needed to satisfy the strategic direction of the company. Let's give them the tools to do the job right and those tools involve training, career opportunities, feedback and recognition.

Don't just eliminate the tools that help develop people, like training, education, and incentives. When looking for training for your middle managers keep these points in mind:

- Focus on programs and processes that guarantee results.
- Use programs and processes that are time-tested, research-based, and results-oriented.
- Use programs that focus on the adult worker and are designed to change behavior, not just focus on behavior.
- Make sure that measuring results is part of the **plan**.

It is estimated that 20% of all new hires will either rise to the top or fall to the bottom and remaining 60% will be productive and be engaged but only if your middle management team is committed to their success. Their achievement can make the difference with both performance and productivity and it must be acknowledged and recognized by their manager. Providing the tools and career path for people to achieve is what makes the difference between a good employee staying or walking out the door.

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