

Only as good as the spine.....

We have talked about this topic before but we have recently found a new analogy for how to view the significance of our organizations middle managers. The way we have recently been explaining it is by looking at an organization as a human body. You might have the brightest vision the sharpest mind. In other words a great head on your shoulders (the senior leadership). This can be combined with strong legs capable of providing a solid foundation to move forward with (the workforce).



John Gregory Vincent

Guess what folks?

Neither of these elements matters if what connects the head to the legs is weak. Middle managers are the spine of any organization. When they are high functioning then and ONLY then does the power of the workforce, combined with the vision of senior leadership actually have a lasting effect of productivity. Only top performing organizations realize this absolute fact.

Many ask us "what do you call middle managers? The names and title change organization to organization but this is how we describe YOUR middle managers. These are the folks that can stop on their way in to the office on the loading dock and easily have a conversation with the men and woman loading the trucks for a few minutes. They can then go to their office do a quick review and then go brief the VP of operations on a critical new initiative they have begun. THAT is a middle manager Every organization has them and most every organization underestimates their importance to the health and success of the organization.

There are a few simple to say, not so simple to do, elements that can take your middle management from ordinary to Extraordinary:

First and foremost is to create a sense of team within the middle managers themselves. This can be difficult. They often view each other as competitions, not peers (for advancement, recognition, bonus' etc.) This can largely be overcome but it is almost always a legitimate issue that must be addressed. Their collective success must be top priority!

Then we need our middle managers to concentrate on improvement in the 4 critical areas of personnel skills that will result in the quickest, most noticeable change in organizational productivity.

1- **FOCUS and alignment.** These two words are POWER. When our management is focused on RESULTS and then backs in to the actions required to get those results we have something powerful. When they work with each other and with those senior and junior to them (alignment) THEN YOU HAVE MAGIC.

2- **Ownership and accountability.** When our managers understand they are the spine that can literally make or break an organization and are empowered to get the job done, the benefits of empowerment start to flow. Higher levels of initiative and performance along with increased accountability at all levels come with this crucial element

3- **Developing strengths.** Most organizations figure out what managers are good at and not so good at and then spend all their time trying to get them good at what they struggle with. In fact this is a sure way to create frustration and produce even worse results. It takes two things to build strength. TALENT and SKILL (experience). The highest functioning organizations work hard to fit their managers to their areas of talent and merely work to ensure they are competent in their areas of weakness.

4- **Communication.** Yes we saved the best and most important element for last in this months newsletter. NEVER have we worked with an organization where our initial assessment revealed "too much" communication within the management staff. It is ALWAYS some level ranging from not too good to non existent. The more your management team sees themselves as a team FIRST and works hard to ensure they see themselves as a resource in and of themselves, the better communication will get. The better their communication becomes the better it will become in those senior to them and junior to them. Why? Middle managers interact daily with BOTH groups and if they are "on the same page" they reinforce focus and alignment with every conversation they have, throughout the organization!

KNOW that your middle management is the spine of your organization. As they go, goes the entire organization. Sustained excellence is IMPOSSIBLE without engaged, committed middle management. How's yours?

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