

The Manager's Role in Your Dealership - Part 1

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In the last issue, I wrote about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as it relates to personal motivation. This theory also relates to selecting the proper people for supervisory and management positions, because they must understand what is important to people under their control and be internally motivated to do their jobs for rewards other than money. (Other sociologists have more traditional theories arguing that money produces better results. Personally, I have only seen that work in the short term.)

Today's businesses are complex operations. In all but the smallest enterprise, it's just not possible for one person (YOU) to oversee every activity. Subordinate managers and supervisors remain key to the smooth and profitable operation of the business. Your challenge is finding and keeping the right people for these important roles.

Customer satisfaction, employee morale, efficiency and profitability can all be traced to effective management in a particular location or department. Good managers bring out the best in employees, leading to greater efficiency and a higher level of customer service, thereby improving your bottom line. Poor managers de-motivate employees and actually cause problems for employees and customers, translating into expensive problems for YOU! Even though most of us recognize the importance of the manager's role, many businesses continue to struggle with ineffective or downright incompetent managers and supervisors.

Managers vs. Supervisors – What's the Difference?

There is a difference between a supervisor and a manager. For instance, supervisors oversee a group within the organization (i.e. office, shop or parts department). Supervisors generally report to a higher-level manager. Supervisory responsibilities include scheduling work, training employees, and assisting with unusual work-related situations or problems. While supervisors may have input into performance evaluation, disciplinary action, hiring, firing and a host of other areas, they usually do not have the authority to actually hire or fire an employee. However, their recommendations often carry some weight.

While many skills and abilities required of managers and supervisors do overlap, the positions are not identical. Managers lead and direct a group of people – including supervisors – by communicating company needs and goals and by helping people strive toward those goals. Managers may also help set goals and create strategies for achieving them. Managers often report to the owner or president of the concern. For this series, I will focus on management positions.

Managers – What Do They Need To Know?

If you remain serious about finding the right person for any position, you must determine the knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform essential functions of the job. Recognize the differences between these positions and the task-oriented jobs that many employees perform. You must clearly understand the role managers play in YOUR business and define your expectations for those who fill these key positions.

Although managers should understand the jobs people are doing, it's not essential for them to be able to perform every job. It is far more important for managers to have the ability to work with people (employees, other managers and customers) in a positive way. To do this, managers must:

- listen effectively - get all pertinent information before making a decision
- remain calm under pressure - and help others do so, as well

- think logically - using past precedent and experience as well as specialized knowledge
- treat people respectfully and fairly - regardless of their perceived status in the organization
- put the long term good of the organization above personal gain or momentary reward
- earn the respect of employees, fellow managers and customers

Did you notice there's not one word about writing up a parts order or tearing down a tractor engine? That's because managers aren't going to be doing that, are they? They have to make sure a job gets done right, so yes, they need to understand what that entails. However, this type of knowledge can be learned.

Every manager should have some general knowledge. For example, managers, perhaps more so than other employees, need to know how to speak and write clearly, understand accounting methods and how to use a computer. In the "old days," management positions came with a secretary (now called administrative assistant), and managers didn't need to know how to type or spell. Nowadays, it's more common for managers to write their own letters and prepare financial reports on a computer. Something else to consider is the increasing reliance your company (like all others) places on computer and Internet use. You need managers who embrace this technology because it's certainly not going away.

Managers may be called upon to speak to groups of people. I once saw a survey where respondents ranked public speaking as more fearful than snakes! (Guess they hadn't seen the new airplane movie.) Sometimes managers conduct training sessions that require a different style of speaking than making a customer presentation or conducting an employee meeting. (I once attended an employee meeting where the CEO announced, "We will be bifurcating the responsibilities of the engineering department." Most of the employees thought this sounded like a nasty, bodily function and assumed the engineering department would be eliminated in some fashion. This caused an awful uproar. What the CEO meant was that R&D was going to be a separate department. He would have been better off saying that!) In short, a manager should either be comfortable with this part of the job or be willing to develop into a competent speaker.

A lot of this knowledge can be gained through formal education. I personally think today's managers should have some college level education – perhaps not a four year degree, but at least the equivalent of an associate's degree in business or human resources. There are reputable universities today that offer on-line classrooms and adult accelerated degree programs. I went back to college later in life and graduated so I know it can be done. I will explore this more in the third article of this series.

What's Next? - In the next article I will discuss what tools you can use to help find and develop good managers, where to look for managers, and the pros and cons of promoting from within. Please stay tuned. If you have any ideas you would like me to explore in upcoming articles, contact me at the HR Help Line (800-683-3440) or at lesley@taxfavoredbenefits.com.