

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Mirror Magic in the Art of Delegation

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“People don’t do what you tell them to do. People copy what they watch you doing.”

This simple aphorism is not only helpful when you raise children, but it’s equally true when you try to motivate your staff to invest the extra effort that makes greenhouse production a success. Workers don’t get motivated on command. It takes far more than the occasional pep talk to change indifference to enthusiasm. Things become even more difficult when we have to delegate the task of motivating as our operations get bigger and we take on more staff.

How should we choose supervisors and help them become more effective motivators? Most operations simply choose the best workers, promote them and hope for the best. We expect that some of their work ethic will rub off onto former co-workers and then we wait for a magical transformation that creates highly efficient teams. What we don’t do enough is to provide any meaningful mentorship to our newly crowned executives. We hardly ever explain to them what it means to supervise. Precious few companies put significant effort into training new managers in the large variety of new skills that are necessary for success. We don’t recognize the ability to supervise and motivate as a skill to be learned, but regard it as “common sense.” The results can be disastrous, particularly if common sense understands supervision to be nothing more than “cracking the whip.”

Coffee drips from the top, in management as well as on the kitchen counter. The results created by supervisors who report to us are usually nothing more than a reflection of our own skills. Supervisors are merely people, and as such, they tend to watch us and copy our style and our methods. Usually they copy our bad habits as well. If we’re used to ordering people around from a distance with a clipboard full of efficiency targets in our hand, then our new team leaders might consider this a necessary requisite for aspirations of success in their own job. If we run around the greenhouse in a sour mood, and if we vent our frustrations on anyone who happens to be unfortunate enough to stand in our way, then our supervisor hopefuls might copy such behavior as acceptable practice for someone with authority.

As managers or supervisors we don’t get paid for our titles or for our positions. We don’t get paid for

“accepting responsibility,” either. Instead, we get paid for the results that we create with the authority that we’re given. Better pay isn’t a result of our knowledge or our capability, but a result of what we do with that capacity. When we delegate supervision, we don’t simply hand this expectation for results down the ladder. The responsibility still rests with us and we better put a lot of effort into becoming good role models and mentors if we want to shine with the achievements of highly motivated teams at every level of our organization.

How can we put this into practice?

1: Try not to ask anyone to do something that you’re not prepared to do yourself. Give supervisors and teams the opportunity to copy you by participating in the grind and do so in good spirits. Show them yourself that the impossible is possible. Walk the talk.

2: Make personal integrity the standard for all your actions. Become conscious of unfair conduct as a result of ego, fear or competitiveness. Keep your promises and don’t promise what you can’t keep. Set high standards for personal behavior.

3: Allocate enough time to help your supervisors become better supervisors and encourage them to spend time helping their workers become better workers. Help supervisors accept the choices they made when they accepted the job. It can be hurtful to learn that with their promotion they’re no longer “part of the gang.” Help them to grow from the experience.

4: Replace frustrated criticism with clear communication of realistic objectives. Don’t ask for what isn’t attainable, and offer enthusiastic and public praise for all accomplishments that bring everybody closer to the common goal. **GT**

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