COMMON MANAGERIAL MISTAKES

Inconsistent Trust Destroying Management Behaviour

When you strip away the effects of various nuts and bolts management techniques, what you find is that effective managers succeed because they build trusting relationships with their employees.

Trust, in turn, builds employee loyalty and motivation. Trust evolves over time, of course, but it can be eroded quickly if managers appear to be inconsistent or unpredictable, to employees. Learn the importance of consistent manager behaviour.

If you look at a group of 100 successful managers, you'll find they are quite different from each other in how they manage. Some are democratic, and some more autocratic. Some are hands on, some hands off. Some are logical, and some are more motivational. These variations make it hard to identify key management behaviours to recommend, or avoid.

However, what you'll also find is that most of those 100 successful managers have been able to generate a solid level of trust. Their employees have confidence in their managers, and trust them to a) make good decisions, and b) treat them fairly.

On the other hand if you look at 100 ineffective managers, you'll find the opposite. Employees are mistrustful, and lack confidence in them. Why?

It's not a mystery. Trust grows when managers exhibit consistent and predictable behaviour. This makes sense because predictability is a major element of trust building. How can someone trust in something that appears to be completely random, or unpredictable? It's like "trusting the weather".

Unfortunately, in the everyday hustle of work, managers don't pay enough attention to their own behaviour -- to ensure that their employees see predictable and trust fostering behaviour.

Pitfalls to Watch For
- **Inconsistent private versus public behaviour** is the fastest way to erode employee trust and loyalty. For example, if you are aggressive in private employee meetings, one-on one, but more hospitable in group meetings, employees will question which is the "real you". Result? Lack of trust.
- **Shifting management philosophies** is also problematic. For example, managers who are sometimes autocratic in their approaches, but at other times, appear to be inclusive and democratic, are confusing. Employees learn that they cannot depend on, or predict what such a manager will do. They cannot know what will be positively received by the manager and what will be met with disapproval. Since people do not trust that which they cannot predict (or depend on), the outcome is employee confusion and loss of trust.

- **Inconsistent or differential treatment of employees** also causes problems. While it's not possible (or even desirable) to treat all employees identically, employees need to see consistent application of both formal and informal rules, and see relatively consistent communication and management styles applied across all employees. Since some differential treatment is bound to occur, it's important that employees understand WHY employees are not treated identically.
- **Inconsistent "walk" versus "talk".** Managers who talk a good game, but behave ("walk") in ways inconsistent with that talk are immediately held suspect. For example, a manager who talks about how much he values employee input, but when rejects employee input when it is offered, is going to be seen as untrustworthy.

Prescriptions for Avoiding Inconsistency Mistakes

- Make a conscious effort to identify your core management beliefs and philosophy, and look at your own behaviour to assess whether you implement that philosophy, and "walk the talk" of your beliefs in a consistent way. It's normal to find inconsistencies. You can eliminate many of them by being clear about what you believe, and trying to act in accordance with those beliefs.
- Don't have different private and public personas. It's a serious mistake to think that private conversations provide licence to act differently, simply because the conversations are private.
- Take the time to explain your decisions and actions to staff, particularly when they involve treating different employees in different ways. If employees understand your reasoning, they will be less likely to mistrust your actions, and more likely to see that you are being consistent. Lack of communication, in general, makes it hard for employees to understand a manager. If employees do not understand a manager, he or she seems unpredictable and inconsistent (and thus, not trustworthy) even when the manager IS being consistent.

Summary

Creating loyal relationships with employees involves addressing inconsistent behaviour. Since it's not possible to appear to be completely consistent and predictable, it's important to communicate with employees so they understand why you may appear to be doing things in inconsistent ways. That helps them resolve apparent conflicting management behaviour. And, it lays the groundwork for trust.

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