

One of the Smartest Managerial Strategies I Ever Heard Of

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Several years ago, I completed a number of consulting and training assignments for a major northeast dairy foods manufacturer.

One of the warehouse managers was both a “get it done” task sort of manager as well as an outgoing “people” sort of manager.

It’s been said a number of times that consultants and trainers often learn things of value from the people they work with, whether they’re executives, middle managers, production workers, and so on. It was never truer than in this case.

From time-to-time, this warehouse manager had to make decisions some of his employees didn’t like. He worked hard to listen to their concerns, ask probing questions, carefully analyze the situation, and take employee considerations into account before deciding.

Even so, some employees didn’t like some of his decisions.

In such instances, many employees, based on their past work experiences, would assume they just had to accept their boss’ decision, no matter how they felt about it, or would be told to “just deal with it, it’s been decided.”

What did this manager do that was so different? Two things, the second one being the most different-and impressive.

- 1) He told his employees that if they ever thought he’d given them a raw deal in a decision to please come and talk with him about it. He promised to listen without arguing or using put downs, and to consider the employee’s point again.

Now, this isn’t so unusual, but what he did next is.

- 2) He told his employees that if they still thought he’d given them a raw deal, they were free to go to his boss and talk with him. He said he’d be willing to be part of the conversation from the outset or later on, if the employee preferred to speak with his boss first. In addition, he

promised he wouldn't become angry or seek retribution against them for going to his boss.

This is *unusual*.

Notice how he applies strong communication and people skills to:

- a. Resolve a concern or situation.
- b. Maintain open communication and respect among all parties, and increase dialogue where needed.
- c. Get a resolution and get back on the job.

In over 25 years as a management consultant and trainer, I've never heard of another manager (or supervisor or executive) doing this. Needless to say, I was impressed.

How do you think his employees regarded his willingness to do this?

They felt much more willing to share concerns with him when they had them instead of letting them fester.

They respected his confidence in allowing them to go to his boss and plead their case against a decision he'd made.

They appreciated his openness and respect.

They knew they'd better have a pretty good reason for going to his boss if they did.

Some employees took him up on his offer, and talked with his boss, a smart and capable businessman who was always polite and willing to listen, but who was not hesitant to make or change decisions when necessary.

In the time I knew this manager, only three employees went to his boss; he reversed one of the manager's decisions and explained why. The manager accepted this without hard feelings or punishing the employee.

Since he respected his boss, he figured his own decision probably hadn't been the best, and now looked upon this as a learning experience.

He discussed his philosophy with his boss in advance, who agreed with it.

How does this strategy apply to retaining and motivating good employees?

Turnover in the warehouse was lower than in other parts of the organization, and people transferred from other parts of the company to work in the warehouse. Morale was high.

In addition, a union organizing vote failed not due to anti-union sentiment, but because employees felt they didn't need it. They knew they had a leader who would listen to them; reconsider his positions if warranted; and freely allow dialogue with his boss, all without fear or punishment.

How would such a strategy improve your organization?

Here's a final point: isn't he a boss you'd want to work for?

Again, it's one of the smartest managerial strategies I ever heard of.