

Are you a Smart Manager?

By Richard Jeffery

Too many managers think they are smarter than they are.

As Dubai continues its meteoric and successful expansion making a profit should be easy. Revenues are growing, but what about profit margins, are they under pressure? Competition may be getting more aggressive but that's life. Managers today have it no tougher than they did in the past; it is just different. Company loyalty has all but evaporated thanks to decades of re-engineering (redundancies), re-structuring (redundancies), flatter hierarchies (redundancies), automation (redundancies) and employee driven markets (e.g. Dubai today).

But who is to say that this is all wrong? We need slimmer, faster and more efficient organizations if we are to keep up with today's rate of evolution.

Besides, the younger generations have different aspirations. They have different values and experiences. For example, they tend to be more socially responsible than baby boomers ever were and they often have limited exposure to careers in secure, long term, work environments. They expect to be mobile and move from job to job faster than older generations can comprehend. These differences lead to differing expectations; it's just different.

Too many managers think they have all the answers. As a consequence they are in danger of thinking that they are smarter than they are. Rather than adapting to the needs of their people in times of change they hold fast to their preconceived ideas, almost always using history as their guide. As we climb the hierarchy we gain status and to many this implies authority, power and knowledge. The problems start when these new "assets" go to our head. Authority allows us to direct those around us in their daily tasks. Power gives us a means to

exert our authority and knowledge convinces us that we know best.

The increasing operating margins we all want will not come from managers and leaders applying more of the same. They need to re-invent themselves by adapting their leadership styles to reflect the reality of today and tomorrow's environment, not yesterday's. Exerting authority through power is no longer a workable tool in knowledge businesses. Knowledge workers in this region are in a sellers market, bully them and they'll leave; your loss. Generation x and y workers see authority as an old fashioned concept. They prefer peer group team-working and given half a chance, they'll challenge your authority.

Given this scenario, success is there for those who can demonstrate leadership without (the use of) authority. They are able to create followers by adopting styles that address the perceived needs of their staff rather than being tied to historical approaches. They listen, they admit their own mistakes, they take advice and they see themselves as part of the team, not simply the leader. Of course this means they must trust their people and for them this may not always have been the case in the past. For trust to last it has to be mutual and genuine, there is no such thing as one sided trust. If a manager can not find it in himself to trust those around him he is doomed to the mediocrity of falling margins and high staff attrition rates.

If yours is one of the organizations in Dubai that sees excessively high staff turnover rates, watch out, the chances are there is too much old management going on. Managers and leaders of the Middle East need to let go of power, ease up on authority and listen to the knowledge around you. Your success is in the hands of your followers. Trust and empower them wisely and they will

follow you. Ignore their needs and they will look for someone else to follow.

Tomorrow will not be the same as yesterday and people will never be the same again; it's just different.

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