



MANAGING BY Walking Around

A Brief Overview. By Emerson Suphal

Abstract

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You have no doubt heard the old adage in business conversations “Your people are your most valuable assets”. While many people passively accept and give nodding acquaintance to this idea, the majority of managers tend to overlook the concept and not fully utilize their staff.

In this article, I will explore some experiences gained from empowering employees and recognizing their capabilities which lead to positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction and value & wealth creation for your business.

Most people enjoy being part of a team in a true sense, where team members support each other and share defeats and victories together. Personally, I can recall some of the most enjoyable times in my life were when I played team sports and as a young employee working on the production floor of a major medical products manufacturer. The huddles and quick meetings for strategy, the delegation of action plans as well as the execution of those plans were followed up by peer appreciation and accolades for a job well done. This positive feedback and acknowledgement helped instilled a sense of value to the team as well as being an integral part of the team’s cohesion.

It created an environment for honest communication, suggestions for improvement and the give and take necessary to distill the many suggested options into the best strategy for the team.

Many years have passed and I continue to experience the powerful benefits that flow from having motivated teams of employees which is the basis for generating and contributing winning ideas.

To begin, job and tasks descriptions should be broad enough to accommodate individual decision making within a certain range without interfering with management prerogatives. This mean job descriptions should contain enough Job Depth (the ability of the employee to make decisions to get the job done) and Job Range (provide a variety of tasks within the job function). Team members are then provided with enough scope to make meaningful contributions. Coupled with Job content is honest communication and feedback from Managers (Team Leaders) to employees, and communication between employees. Indeed, research have shown that job content in a team environment contributes more to employee job satisfaction than money. Job satisfaction lead to low employee turnover, lower absentee rates, higher morale, winning teams, ideas generation and increased company profits.

The first requirement for tapping your employees for winning ideas is the development of a genuine team through effective leadership. Teams need leaders they can respect and whose support they can depend on. In return, employees will go the extra mile without asking anything in return except to be recognized as having made a contribution. This can be done in many ways, but I prefer recognition from the Company President or Senior Manager by presentation of an award plaque together with a gift or dinner certificate and recognition on the company bulletin boards and newsletter. I am aware of one auto parts manufacturer who implemented a “Quality Champions” programs in an effort to reduce quality defects. The program was unique in that nominations for the Quality Champion Award had to come from fellow employees and peers and not from managers or supervisors.

The reasoning was that team members on the production floor were on the front line when defective parts arrived at their work stations and they had to dispose or rework them. Team members had significant job depth and job range to make suggestions for improvement which reduced defective products and improved profitability. This led to the company receiving the “Supplier of the Year” award from one of the big three auto companies.

Your people are your most valuable assets when you engage, recognize and open your door to their ideas and talents. In North America we have the distinct advantage of employing people from different parts of the world. Many people immigrated to have a better life and brought significant previous educational achievements and work experiences. I am familiar with one company who purchased advanced German Machinery and recruited engineering specialists from Russia to work with these machines. Many of the Russians were learning to speak English and this contributed to a major communication problem for the team. Then one day the Manager was “managing by walking around” and stopped to talk with one of the employees working a small machine at the back end of the factory. The conversation led from one topic to another and the Manager was taken by the sheer knowledge and interest of the employee. Further conversation uncovered that this employee was from Sri Lanka, had a PhD degree in engineering from Moscow University and was fluent in Russian. What a find. The employee was “brought up” to bridge the communication gap with the Russian Engineers and made a significant contribution to the team not the mention the company’s bottom line.

Make an effort to know your employees. Build your team with good leadership, communication and employee recognition. You will discover untapped treasures of knowledge and skills in your team of employees waiting to be recognized and eager to offer winning ideas. [You are surrounded by employees with winning ideas, recognize them, motivate them and welcome them into your team. Your company’s bottom line will reflect the rewards.](#)

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