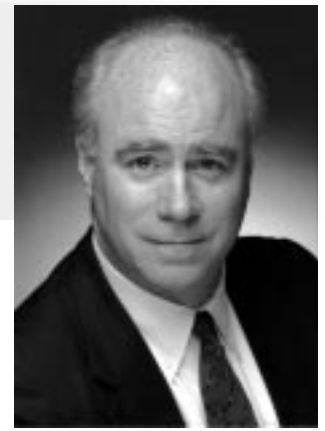


The Coaching Corner

with

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Creating Partnerships: The Road to Hell?

In the last issue we talked about the quality and partnership imperative for middle managers. This issue will identify why creating a partnership between management and staff is so challenging.

Risk Aversion: In compliant organizations where people are acculturated to follow the rules, people become so afraid of doing something wrong that they seldom attempt anything innovative or “outside the box.” This is especially true with the staff on the front lines, but it is also true with managers, especially those promoted out of the ranks of staff. It is far easier to “cover your a_ _” than take the risk of trying something new. This behavior is rooted in a fear of failing and being wrong.

Punishing the Offender: Why do people in management positions fear being wrong? Because too often they have been punished in the past for taking initiative that may have

bent or broken a rule. The director of a freestanding hospital-owned clinic canceled patient visits on the day of a heavy snowstorm after conferring with the clinic Medical Director. She was called on the carpet by the COO for failing to check with him first per the policy. What lesson do you think she learned that day?

Micromanaging: Those who micromanage seemingly trust no one but themselves to make a decision, so they end up making all the decisions. If middle managers are being micromanaged, and aren't being allowed to make mistakes and *learn* from those mistakes, they are, at least, learning that middle management is all about being compliant, following rules to the letter, not being innovative, not taking initiative, and knowing that if they do any of these things they will be punished.

The New Manager Syndrome: It is a great day! The lab tech who has done a great job as a technician is being promoted into a management position for which she has never been educated or trained, yet

she is being made a manager anyway. And she is being left to figure out her role as a manager (*as opposed to her old role*

as staff member) pretty much by herself. Some succeed, other fail. Those who fail are typed as an example of the Peter Principle. Isn't it sad that organizations create this situation, and then blame failure on the individual?

Tradition: Traditions can be great. They remind us of our heritage, celebrating what got us here. The danger of tradition is that it can prevent us from seeing the problem in front of us. “*We've always done things this way and we've been successful, so why change?*”

Imagine if your hospital, rooted in a tradition of inpatient care, hadn't seen and adapted to the trend towards outpatient care.

Us vs. Them: “*How can we have a partnership with*

THEM?” Who is speaking here? Management or labor? Could be either one. And therein lies the challenge. Management doesn't always trust staff to make decisions, and staff doesn't believe management really wants to hear their ideas. Count on skepticism as you set out to create a partnership with your staff. Is this the management “flavor of the month”? Is this just a thin veneer designed to mask old, autocratic behaviors? You have to fully understand and embrace the notion of partnership and have the skills and ability to make it happen, even in the face of often profound disbelief. You have to walk the talk, for as soon as you don't, you reinforce old perceptions (*traditions?*) and must endure the backlash from your misstep.

At the heart of all these Road to Hell factors is lack of trust. If you do not actively foster trust, if you are not willing to seriously examine and change those practices that undermine trust, no form of partnership or participatory management will succeed.

“Creating a partnership between management and staff is challenging.”

“Being an employee in a hassling company is a lot like living at home after you grow up and having your parents decide all kinds of things for you.” —Philip Crosby