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EFFECTIVE MOTIVATION: TRAINING

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Motivation and training--two highly overworked words in our management vocabulary. They are treated with the same reverence as God, country, and motherhood. There isn't a trade journal, college text, supervisory seminar, convention program, or company manual that doesn't include these concepts. Why? Because they are important and, also, they are "attention getters." So much has been written and said about each of these words it seems redundant to discuss them here. The fact is, however, because of how they have been presented, and are being employed in the business world, we need to take a look at them.

There has been a tendency for oversimplification of the terms by presenters and thus a lessening of the importance of motivation and training, as concepts, in the minds of receivers. All too often presenters get carried away with explanations of that which is interesting and omit the essentials. Sometimes they are only familiar with that which is interesting, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the background of On-The-Job Training. As a result they consume their presentation time on the basics and never get to the lesson on application.

The question continues to loom--why? Why aren't we applying even more extensively and intensely that which we agree to as being potentially sound and effective management techniques? Why aren't the concepts of motivation and training being transferred from the

classroom, convention workshop, or academic text to the real world? True, there are many examples we could think of where this is happening. However, the fact remains that a continued major reason for a manager's failure or company's demise is the inability to harness the energies and talents of employees toward a productive goal coupled with an inadequacy to prepare employees in the performance of their jobs in a manner consistent with company success.

The answer seems to lie within one of four reasons:

1. We don't understand motivation and training.
2. We don't want to believe what is known about motivation and training.
3. We don't want to work as hard as motivation and training require to be effective.
4. We don't really care about motivating or training employees.

1. We Don't Understand

Management and supervisory personnel have a tendency to accept the principles of motivation and training like many of us read a book. We scan the table of contents and the first chapter or two until we get the "gist" of it then lay it down. All too often we walk away with the principles or rules of the game but don't know how to play. That's the way

it is with motivation and training. Most practitioners (manager and supervisors) listen and hear just enough to make them knowledgeable of but not skillful in the application of the principles.

Another contributor to our lack of understanding is that we all pride ourselves in knowing and understanding people. After all, isn't that the job of supervisors and managers? Most of us, although we try to "turn employees on" or "get them off on the right foot" have only moderate success. Instead, we experience a high degree of frustration and blame the employee for our inadequacies. It is unfortunate that managers and supervisors don't realize their frustration stems from the difference between their perceptions, and their employees, their misunderstandings of human behavior, employees changing life styles, and a lessening of employee commitment to the goals and objectives of the company.

2. We Don't Want to Believe

Habits are difficult to change. Philosophical habits are all the more difficult to alter. It is difficult for anyone to give up thoughts which they have cultivated for years in exchange for new ways of doing things. This is so very true when it comes to motivation and training. Each of us follows a motivational and training model that has been set for us by someone we admire--a parent, relative, teacher, friend or employer. It is through this model that we each fashion our interactions with others around us.

When we are introduced to concepts inconsistent with that which we know or practice, there's a natural tendency to reject them. Or, if they are new, accept just enough to superficially get by. Thus, we accept or reject the tip of the iceberg and ignore the reasoning and

logic that lies beneath the surface. In either case we are quick to pass judgment in favor of holding on to that we've practiced for years (include situational exercise for audience).

We each tend to take the undesirable position of "don't confuse me with facts, my mind's made up!" Thus, our knowledge of motivation and training remains stagnant or at best minimally changed.

3. We Don't Want it to be Hard Work

Everyone wants the easiest way out. There's nothing wrong with that except it doesn't apply to motivation and training. To apply effective motivational technique and training practices takes untold amounts of time, energy and gray matter. All these are commodities we are reluctant to exercise. Instead, we want the "laundry list" or "cookbook" solution to these complex areas. Maybe our theorists have made it look too easy. Or, possibly, the highly organized business world has led us to believe that everything belongs in an orderly pigeonhole. Even though people intellectualize that the world is complex, they still clamor for their notepad when a speaker says "The five principles are..."

The same is true with motivation and training. Tell me the seven steps to motivate and the five techniques for training and you will have my attention. Unfortunately, that's short sighted thinking and it shows the naiveness of the person.

There are no magic formulae! There is a great deal of hard work. And, yes, it takes time, energy, and gray matter, but the results and rewards are there.

Be careful! The tendency of food industry specialists, particularly retail operations people is to look for immediate returns, because that's how they are

measured. We all need to be aware that motivation and training reap rewards and benefits that have a lasting affect on the individual and company. But we must be willing to pay the price for them.

4. We Don't Really Care

This is an all too common realism. Although we would never voice it, our actions demonstrate it. Over and over, we hear the virtues of motivation and training advocated almost like the alcoholic taking the pledge. But then, we go back to the job and slip back into the comfortable molds of indifference never to be heard from until the next crisis occurs. Then, once again, we say something like, "We've got to do something about making our employees more committed", (if that were possible) or "We've got to better prepare people to do this or that so it doesn't happen again". Sur, enough, next time it happens with the same regularity and the same strong convictions for change are voiced. The only conclusion that can be reached is that people care, but not enough to change it. And, as an addendum, we might say that if people really cared, they would do something about it, since we always find time or money to do those things we enjoy or think are vitally important.

Of course, another side to the "don't really care" coin is that the professionals haven't done an effective job of informing, selling, or demonstrating the motivation and training story. In too few companies has the person responsible for motivation and training programs demonstrated results sufficient to accelerate themselves into decision making management. Instead the training person is subjugated to a "left-field" management position--needed as a nicety but not a necessity. This would change quickly if trainers placed more emphasis on behavioral objective setting,

measurement techniques, and results based training, instead of flashing new games and gimmicks in hardware and the latest in acronyms and buzz words. maybe then, management would care.

Where are we Today

1. With rare exception, much food distribution training is focused on technical skills--that which produces an immediate return. There is nothing wrong with that unless it is at the exclusion of human skills development such as those skills required to get the work done through others.

2. The critical link in the management chain remains the first line supervisor or manager. We continue to promote persons into supervision based more on their ability to produce than their abilities to have others produce.

3. The food industry tends to promote first then train second. That is, a person is promoted into the next level of competence, then the training begins. In a supervisory position this type of post facto training causes untold amounts of costly errors.

4. There is still a tendency to train out of crises, or worse, to train for training's sake. The test for whether these potentially dangerous symptoms exist in an organization is a simple one: was a training needs analysis conducted before training was embarked upon. Of course, to imply that a training needs analysis was employed, hopefully implies the organization is taking a systematic approach to both motivation and training.

5. Inadvertently, many of our operational practices and procedures tend to be demotivators or negative motivators for employees. They work. However, the questionability of their consequences is an issue the food industry needs to address.

Examples of demotivation can be seen in the misuse of position titles (where a manager isn't permitted latitude to hire and fire without approval of a higher manager), window signs at retail broadcasting for "Help Wanted" (it is hoped the industry is in need of more than just help which infers a somewhat desperate cry for a pair of hands--possibly "Position Available" would be more appropriate language), or the overdependence on the polygraph in areas where it is permitted (to many people this tool challenges their privacy, particularly when used to uncover an in-store problem). This is not saying we should avoid these situations, but recognize the potential implications and consequences of them relative to promoting an effective organizational climate.

6. The food industry tends to follow other industries in motivation and training. We tend to adopt and adapt those principles which worked for others. Again, there is nothing wrong with this providing we aren't waiting for others to introduce the next training or motivation innovation. Why shouldn't we be able to initiate and take the lead in setting the model for other practitioners to follow. If the industry really

believed in motivation and training, the dollars and time invested would be viewed as an investment complete with risks and returns. Instead, we wait and ride on the "shirrtails" of our more affluent business cohorts from other industries.

The Challenge

The food industry need not practice antiquated motivation and training techniques. We are as capable as any industry to be innovative in the development of motivation and training tools and approaches that meet our unique situations and conditions.

As outside influences (government, unions, competition, etc.) and constraints continue to plague supervision with well intentioned requirements, the application of more effective motivation and training techniques designed for and applicable to the food industry become imperative. But, with exception, not enough is being done to meet the challenge of the future in the research of our human resources.