Management Counsel

Management By Best Seller

A client remarked that he was troubled by leaders who jump from promoting one best selling author to the next. He felt that some leaders don't search for the best that each author might offer in order to blend it into the organization.

He saw leaders applying all of one author's theory, for a few months, then switching to another author's theory, and so on -- resulting in instability and lack of confidence in the leader's sense of direction. My client called this approach **management by best seller.**

Best sellers have a lot to offer leaders today. But, we agree with our client that care in application must be taken, seeking to blend with and supplement the existing organization culture and management approach. Only in the rare case will a fundamental shift be appropriate, perhaps in a crisis.

An amusing example (as one looks back -- it wasn't amusing for the client at the time) of best seller misapplication occurred quite a few years ago. We were working with a client to improve productivity. The GM was well respected, and open to new ideas. Perhaps too open as it turned out!

The GM had been reading a book that, he said, was a study of baboons. He thought his managers acted like the baboons in that book and that they could learn from reading the book. He told them so,

and was shocked that they were upset at being called baboons! And, didn't see the value to be had.

The book the GM was reading was "**In the Shadow of Man**" by Jane Goodall -- a very good study of chimpanzees. Perhaps the managers would have been happier to be called chimps...

The GM was several years ahead of his time, as it turns out. Newt Gingrich recently recommended a book by Frans de Waal "Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex among Apes" to freshman Republicans. de Waal sees corporate life lessons to be learned from chimpanzees (which is what the GM was trying to tell his managers based on his reading):

◊ the top executive is always paranoid -- and with good reason
◊ being too aggressive results in a leader's downfall. Alienated subordinates exploit opportunity to be rid of the dictator
◊ loners are powerless, since they lack a coalition to back them in times of crisis
◊ meetings are a forum for testing the strength of coalitions. Watch whose jokes get laughed at and whose ideas are ignored.

The General Manager had a good idea -- too bad that he didn't think of a way to apply it in a way that would reach his managers. Of course, Mr. Gingrich has had a

little trouble applying concepts too!

It is difficult to implement good ideas from best sellers, let alone implementing the entire best seller, or jumping from one to the next.

Intellectual Property At Risk

R eports indicate an increase in the theft of intellectual property: illegal copying of software; theft of data files or trade secrets; corporate espionage.

Do organizations have meaningful strategies and processes to minimize the risk? How many organizations appreciate the value of the intellectual property or perhaps, what is their intellectual property?

A study by the American Society for Industrial Security indicated that **corporate strategic plans** have displaced **customer lists** as the most sought-after items -- and that these are often taken by employees and other associates.

CSIS, the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, is warning businesses of foreign spies who

Inside This Issue

now use sophisticated techniques to gain industry data and secrets.

What can and should be done about this alarming trend?

Providing written instructions to employees, having physical control of access, marking and classifying sensitive materials, and random audits and searches are some techniques that organizations should employ.

But, perhaps all of this will never affect your organization. Perhaps you are too small. Perhaps no one really wants your corporate plan, your technical software, your client files, or the procedures you use... but should you take that risk? Or, should you take some reasonable, preventive steps?

Public Sector Growth

T here is not much support for growth in the public sector. Outsourcing or privatizing reduces the numbers of public servants, and lowered spending reduces the numbers of government programs. This has met with wide spread support, albeit with some discussion of "reinvesting" or strategic spending for such matters as child poverty or employment.

The private sector is currently emphasizing **growth** and a growth orientation. Why? Because it has been shown that constant "downsizing" or creating value for shareholders by focusing on cost reduction has not proven to be successful long term. Growth equals challenges -- shrinking equals stresses.

Can we conceive of an approach in the public sector where the positive features of growth are resident, while not breaching the maxim of lowered or contained spending?

Mission Possible by Ken Blanchard of "One Minute Manager" fame presents an interesting question: "Which approach is better -- *improving what is, or creating what isn't?*" He postulates that **both** are needed.

If public sector organizations answer "YES" to both elements of this question, it is possible that a positive attitude, reflective of growth in the private sector, could be achieved.

For example, if one focuses on "improving what is" the benefits of service improvement **and** lowered costs could be achieved, with a sense of accomplishment being shared by employees.

And as we have not solved all of the social, health, and educational requirements, creating something that isn't must also be embraced, again with a sense of accomplishment to be shared.

But underlying this must be stability and confidence for the employees, for it is they who will undertake this work. Presuming that this condition can be established, then Mission Possible suggests an approach to creating a "growth" like atmosphere in the public sector.

Organization Confidence

L eadership enables the confidence that is so essential to an organization's success. Good leaders know that once confidence is shaken, employee effectiveness drops.

Lowered confidence results when the directions chosen by leaders are unclear or weak; when leaders make apparently arbitrary or inconsistent decisions; and, when the individuals' interests are seen as secondary to the organization.

We hear about the impact of organizational confidence when it is said that "morale is good" or "morale is poor", for without confidence, morale cannot be good.

Leaders can take concrete steps to **build and maintain confidence** within the organization:

◊ describe the organization's direction and act consistent to it
◊ get people working on real work
◊ rely on the people in the organization -- let them do what their skills allow, even with risk
◊ communicate: both ways
◊ acknowledge peoples' interests
◊ make the physical environment consistent with the direction
◊ cut out jargon -- describe real issues in real terms
◊ link accountability and rewards.

Many other elements can be used -- good leaders innovate and create new ways to encourage confidence, to create followers. All leaders must accept that this is a major part of their role.