

How Would Your Staff Describe Your Management Skills?

If someone were to ask your staff what they thought of you as a manager, what would they say?

If you have ever worked for a really good, or a really bad, boss you know what a difference it can make to your working life. With a good manager people are happier and, more importantly, get more done and to a higher standard because they tend to 'go the extra mile'.

Good Management Improves Patient Outcomes

There is a growing evidence base to show that good people management practices have a measurable impact on the bottom line. In 2001 a DoH funded study found a significant relationship between staff appraisal, staff development and patient mortality in acute hospitals. The most dramatic finding was that, when all other factors were taken into account, hospitals with sophisticated approaches to appraisal had 12.3% fewer deaths after hip fractures. If you would like to read more about this study the internet reference is:

www.improvingworkinglives.co.uk/london/documents/borrelwestreport.doc

Yet for some reason developing our management skills and spending time developing our staff can sometimes come low on our list of priorities. There's always something more urgent to be done than coaching a team member who needs a bit of support. But being a good staff manager doesn't have to take up a lot of time. It's like cultivating house plants - a little bit of regular attention can go a long way.

What's New?

If it's been a while since you've done any management development, here are some of the current trends.

Emotional Intelligence. One of the buzz phrases of the late nineties and early noughties. It encompasses the skills need to manage yourself and manage your relationships. Emotional Intelligence (EI) became a hot topic when it became clear that it is what differentiates star performers from average workers. This means that the outstanding Finance Directors may have similar levels of technical expertise to their peers but they excel in terms of their EI. Aim to develop your own EI and that of your staff by ensuring that not all your training budget goes on professional or technical development activities.

Evidence based practice. There have been calls recently for management practice, like clinical work, to be evidence based. In some areas of management there is lots of research to support particular ways of doing things. For example, studies show that traditional approaches to selection interviews give you a one in three chance that, when they actually start work,

the candidate will turn out to be as good as you thought they were going to be. The research shows that using work samples or highly structured interviewing is a better way of recruiting people.

Learning from real life. Nowadays there's general acceptance that you can't learn about management just by going on courses and reading books. Some of the most useful ways of learning involve spending time with colleagues from other departments or organisations. Meeting on a monthly basis with a mentor or a learning set (a problem solving group) can give you lots of practical help with solving the day to day difficulties you encounter at work – particularly the 'wicked' problems: the ones where there isn't an easy answer.

Short, sharp sessions. The biggest resource constraint when it comes to developing yourself and your staff often isn't the money. It's finding the time. Organisations are increasingly demanding short training sessions – lasting less than a couple of hours - on a particular topic and delivered at the workplace.

360 degree feedback. This is when an individual gets feedback on their performance not just from their boss but from a range of people all around them (hence the term '360 degrees'). Contributors to the feedback can include your staff, colleagues within your department or other parts of the organisation, and contacts in other organisations. Often the feedback is collected and analysed by a third party on your behalf. Many managers have found 360 degree feedback an extremely powerful way of helping them to develop. One study found that the best way of identifying effective and high performing managers was to look at the ratings that managers had been given by their *staff* in a 360 degree feedback exercise.

Diversity. Diversity means a lot more than equal opportunities. It means being able to appreciate the differences within your team and use those differences to good effect. As a manager this entails understanding the personalities of your staff and, especially, how they are different from you. The best managers manage their staff the way their staff like to be managed. The worst managers manage their staff the way the manager likes to be managed.

Seven Tips

You're a busy professional but you would like to update your management skills. Here are seven quick and practical ways of ensuring that you get it right most of the time.

1. *Get some feedback.* Not just from your immediate manager. You could go for a full 360 degree feedback exercise (talk to your Training and Development Department about how to do this) or you might simply ask your boss to collect feedback from colleagues and your staff before your annual appraisal.

2. *Find a role model.* Simply identify someone who you think is a good people manager, observe what they do, then copy them. It doesn't have to be a formal arrangement – you don't have to tell the person that you have adopted them as a role model..
3. *One-to-ones.* Sit down with each member of staff twice a year and ask about how they are finding the job, their aspirations etc. These conversations should be different from the regular “how are you getting on with x project?” chats.
4. *Remember that your staff are different from you.* Managing people the way we like to be managed can cause problems. Think cats and dogs – dogs like lots of praise and attention, cats need less. If you are a cat and you are managing a dog you may need to adjust your style!
5. *Count your strokes.* We're not talking about physical contact here. A stroke is when you give someone some attention. The problem for many of us is that we give more negative strokes than positives – we notice, and point out, mistakes rather than commenting on what has been done well. So, for one day, count the number of times you say something positive and the number of times you say something negative (this is worth doing at home too). Then work on increasing the number of positive strokes.
6. *Management by chocolate.* Have some way of celebrating when things have gone well, the end of projects, month/year end etc. In most places this seems to involve cakes! We have it on good authority from the nutrition adviser to the England world cup winning rugby team that chocolate treats raise morale.
7. *Read one book a year.* Aim to get through one book each year on managing people. Try 'Working It Out At Work' by Julie Hay, and 'Improve Your People Skills', by Peter Honey.