



Sing a Song of Sixpence

By Stuart White
Printed in the Sunday Standard
Sunday 21st November 2010

Have you ever come across a really bad manager? I am not talking middle-of-the-road, muddling through 'not the greatest boss in the world' type of overseer. I am referring to those people who come to work every morning and just make your life miserable because they are skill-less, empathy-detached morons usually with an ego bigger than the land mass of Australia. There are millions of them out there – dysfunctional individuals who just don't get the leadership thing, couldn't care less about your positive contribution, but oh boy do they love it when you stuff it up? The sad fact is they simply don't know any better and are self-deluded in thinking they are doing a great job.

I cringe when I think back to the first role that I held with supervisory responsibility. I was a mean, over controlling, unapproachable, inflexible little Napoleon who thought that his job was about catching people doing things wrong, reprimanding them and threatening repercussions if people didn't toe the line. I am not any of these things by nature but years of watching how other people managed and did things, as well as the work environment I found myself in, had all shaped how I thought I should manage. I thought my job was about policing and controlling and so did my bosses - that's what was expected of me. I was considered an A-performer and quickly moved up the ranks rewarded for my dictatorial style and results. Reflecting on my early career now (and poor subordinates) I realise that whilst the boxes of productivity, workplace discipline and results may well have been ticked in the short-term, there was to no real significant progress and gain for the longer term, either for the company or those employed there.

When listening to CEOs and leaders talk, it is easy to figure out what they think their job is. Some believe their job is about providing vision, others think it's about policing managers, for some its co-ordinating efforts, identifying when people do things right and when they do things wrong...the list is exhaustive. But the one sure thing is that people will act consistent with how they think they are supposed to act and what they are rewarded for. All you have to do is to watch their emphasis, language and behaviour and it will tell you the type of leader they are, what they see their contribution as being, and what the corporate culture is.

Most managers see their role as managing processes and results and it's hardly surprising as this is what we have trained managers to do and what we have re-enforced through time. The message has been clear – deliver results – regardless of the human costs. This type of thinking leads managers to focus on what people are doing wrong – to catch them at it (oftentimes with a 'gotcha' attitude), correct the problem and then move on to nab the next offender . . . and the cycle continues, day in and day out. It's a very mechanical, style-less, operational methodology and overall ineffective. But it's a trap we all fall into many times a day. It's easy, an easily-measurable short-term approach that requires little imagination or creativity.

A much more proactive and creative approach however is to see your leadership role differently and make the shift towards managing people's *energy*. This you do by consciously refining your emphasis, language, and behaviours so that interactions with staff lead them to feel trusted, honoured, and respected. Instead of focusing on what people do wrong, the emphasis changes to thanking them for what they've done right - their contributions to the organisation's success!

Let me give you an example of management best practice called 'six pennies' which is often quoted and illustrates what I consider to be good leadership. This mechanism was used by a CEO of a large full-facility YMCA with childcare, fitness programmes, racquetball, indoor pool, etc. At the time, the CEO knew staff were doing great things every day with centre members – and that he'd miss seeing those things if he was tied to his desk. So each workday morning, he would put six pennies in his right front pants pocket and then for an hour, he'd tour around the facility, looking for people doing things right. When he found one, he'd wait for the appropriate moment to pull them aside, praise what he saw, thank them and move on. In two minutes, he validated their contribution and commitment by letting them know it had been acknowledged and appreciated.

Then as he left, he'd take a penny from his right front pocket and move it to his left. He kept meandering through the facility until he'd delivered at least six praisings in that hour, and in the afternoon he would spend another hour doing the same thing. His staff LOVED him – they genuinely felt trusted, respected, and honored.

Result? Motivation, inspiration, and aspiration; a workforce pumped up and going for the burn every time they punched in; productivity up; morale sky high. Compare that to a facility ruled with a rod of iron by a Stormtrooper in civvies, ferreting for faults, punishing rather than praising and cracking a whip rather than the odd joke. Result? Perspiration, desperation and agitation, downtrodden staff with their noses so stuck to the grindstone, the wheel can't turn, output stagnant, corporate life force flat-lining.

Two sides of the management coin – has the penny has finally dropped?

Agree or disagree with this? Don's twitter amongst yourselves – tweet your chirps to http://twitter.com/Stuart_Botswana

Managing Director

HRMC

Phone: 395 1640

<http://www.hrhc.co.bw/>

Follow Stuart on twitter: http://twitter.com/Stuart_Botswana

Executive Recruitment | Strategic Planning | Organisational Transformation | HR Outsourcing
Management Assessment and Development | Training and Executive Coaching | Psychometric Testing

HRMC
Management Consultants

www.hrmc.co.bw