



TenStep Supplemental Paper

22 January 2004

Counsel Thy Employee!

Sam's heart is bursting with anxiety. He has an appointment with his boss, Jane. For the third time in a row, Sam has goofed up with the address on the shipping order. Sam is the shipment clerk in an upcoming e-retailing company, which is known for its prompt and safe delivery.

As Sam enters Jane's office, he is hoping and praying that his discharge from services will be as graceful as possible. He was warned about his carelessness twice before! Contrary to his expectations, Jane offers Sam a cup of coffee along with a comfortable chair. After small talk, Jane gets down to business. "Sam, I am concerned that you don't understand the importance of checking the correct address prior to shipping orders. Let's discuss the steps you intend to take to correct this problem and your plan to implement them."

During the ensuing one hour-long conversation, Jane becomes the counselor and Sam the counselee. Jane comes up with suggestions for a work plan to avoid mix-ups of shipping orders. Sam is more than happy to try out the plan. Anything, as long as he does not lose his job!

What is counseling?

In plain and simple terms, counseling enables you to see a glass half full when it is half empty. People's performances are influenced by personal and work related problems. In such circumstances, they feel the need for some outside support to help them through the difficult situations. Thus, it is part of the normal role of the manager to counsel his or her staff whenever the need arises.

Technically, counseling can be defined as help provided by managers to the subordinates in analyzing their performance and job behavior. It enables individuals to take responsibility by helping them to overcome their worries and resolve difficulties.

Is counseling required at workplace?

It is essential to help subordinates understand the organizational culture better. It enables employees to realize their potential and increase interpersonal effectiveness. Counseling provides an emphatic atmosphere wherein employees share and discuss their frustrations and problems. It enhances the capacity to deal with problems by generating appropriate alternatives.

Hurdles for counseling

The biggest foe to counseling is a rigid organizational structure that allows little or no interaction among employees. Time is another constraint, as counseling requires undivided and uninterrupted attention. Improper and ineffective communication also hinders counseling. Lack of trust on the employees' part is a major inhibiting factor. If the counselor is not genuine in his approach, counseling fails miserably, as the employee may feel manipulated.



TenStep Supplemental Paper

Essentials of counseling

- **Identify the problem.** Give the employee a chance to describe the problem before analyzing it. Analysis includes the causes of the problem, efforts made by the employee to overcome it, and various remedial measures available.
- **Establish rapport with the employee.** Trust, warmth, acceptance, mutuality, and openness are the key ingredients to building rapport. This enables the employee to communicate problems without any inhibitions or apprehension.
- **Listen attentively.** This is essential for effective counseling.
- **Explore with queries.** Questions are asked to clarify issues, focus properly on the problem, establish mutuality, stimulate thinking, and demonstrate interest. They are not asked to make the employee withdraw. Thus, refrain from aggressive questioning.
- **Ample time.** Effective counseling needs sufficient time. This does not mean that the counseling can go on for hours at a time. Patient listening is a must, and that needs time.
- **Create a feeling of challenge.** Formulate challenging statements to make the conversation interesting. Also, this creates the spirit to fight.
- **Set limits.** When faced with situations beyond your help, bring in someone better equipped to help.
- **Concrete advice.** Counseling is not just limited to listening; it calls for proactive problem solving as well.
- **Help the employee make decisions.** Let him arrive at a decision after helping him navigate through various stages of problem identification, solutions, and alternatives. The onus of the decision should rest on him completely.