

10 March 2007

### Managing People Tactfully

*People Skills – A must for managers*

#### **Key learnings**

- The importance of people skills
- Common mistakes managers make
- How managers must relate to people

During an appraisal meeting, a manager gave the following feedback on a programmer's performance:

Joe, I am sorry to say this. You have not come up to our expectations. I wonder how you will, but you must make up for your slack performance. I can give you a month's time at the most.

Joe was thoroughly de-motivated. At the outset he had no clue of the manager's expectations. He hadn't mentioned anything previously. On his own initiative he felt that he had given his best to make the project a success. He had made errors but he had immediately made attempts to rectify them. Nevertheless, he could not justify his stance to the manager.

Managers rarely realize that they are not managing things but people. In most organizations, people who perform remarkably in their jobs scale up to the level of managers. However, handling tasks tactfully is not equal to handling people tactfully. The skills required to perform a job well are different from those required to manage people.

Everything managers do or say has a great impact on the people working for them. Consequently, this has a great impact on the work to be done. Collaborative effort of employees alone can make a business successful. So, it is imperative that they are happy with their jobs. This depends entirely on how skillfully managers can manage people and their tasks.

#### **Manage or mismanage?**

Research proves that approximately 80% of the people quit jobs due to bad managers. Knowingly or unknowingly, managers tend to make certain mistakes that directly impact the workforce. A few common mistakes:

*Holding the employees responsible for all that goes wrong* - For instance, a manager along with a team of twenty people worked on a big project. The project failed due to some lapse. During the review meeting, the manager held two of his team members responsible for the failure. In reality the manager's inability to direct his team properly had caused the failure.



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*Bashing up employees before others* – It is important to treat each and every employee with respect. Any criticism or view on the employee's performance must be done in privacy. Managers must abstain from any personal attacks on their team members.

*Refusing to lend an ear to their points of views* – It is good to encourage employees to speak their mind. This makes them feel important.

*Withholding praise* – It is a common notion that constant praise stunts growth. Criticism alone helps people improve. However, the reverse is true. Not praising employees for the good work they do leaves them frustrated and de-motivated.

*Imposing unreasonable rules* – For instance, a manager in a firm was against his team going out together for lunch during office hours. He was actually against any sort of non-job related activities within his team. This only got his team against him.

*Failing to give clear-cut instructions* – Giving vague instructions or not giving any directions at all is likely to leave the employees confused and defocused. Managers need to clearly communicate their expectations to their team and work out the task and schedule in their presence.

*Exhibiting an 'I don't care' attitude* – It is not just enough to set expectations and deadlines. It is equally important to check whether the plan is feasible. For this managers need to know each of their team members well. Setting lofty goals and compelling people to accomplish them is not realistic. Managers need to be caring and help their teams to resolve problems.

*Refusing to acknowledge mistakes committed* – Managers need to openly admit mistakes to build trust with employees. A simple apology can work wonders.

### **Things to do**

To strike a rapport with their team members, managers must act appropriately in all their dealings with their team members. Here are some suggestions:

#### *Congratulate the team for the good work done*

During performance reviews and even otherwise it is good to highlight the strengths of the team. This will motivate them.

#### *Celebrate team success*

As a token of appreciation, a get together after every successful project would be a good idea. The team's performance is thus acknowledged.

#### *Exhibit care and concern*

Lending an ear to the team's genuine problems, be they personal or official, will help effective people management.

#### *Exhibit interest in team member's growth*

Evincing interest in the each team member's career advancement ensures them that even their growth is taken into account



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### *Make constructive criticism*

Comments or suggestions should be made on the person's performance in a constructive fashion. Personal affronts are better avoided. Nor should the team be put down. All remarks must be directed towards the individual's growth, which will in turn help the company's growth.

Managers are middlemen who coordinate with the top management on behalf of the team and vice versa. Therefore, it is imperative that they are politically correct in all their dealings with people.