

27 April 2004

The Pecking Order

Managers need to emphasize the value of equality when communicating with their colleagues. A relationship is very important and should not be damaged by communication errors. Women tend to put emphasis on equality and stability in relationships, whether they are talking to men or women. Men, on the other hand, tend to emphasize the "pecking order" in a relationship. Men want to know if the relationship is equal (friendship), conflicting (wrestler), or superior/subordinate (coach).

When a male employee has a female supervisor, problems can occur if she is not aware of the 'pecking order' communication. If a female supervisor communicates with a male subordinate as if he were an equal, she is likely to create a "pecking order" of equality or friendship with him. This could result in a loss of control. She may find that the men she supervises do not listen to her or even end up giving her orders. After this, if she tries to change the pecking order relationship, men may label her a "dragon lady," "witch," "bossy," or even a "mom."

The end result of not following the pecking order is a conflicting relationship leading to a needless power struggle where a majority of time is spent in conflict resolution.

Women must derive their power from their position within the company and the amount of support the company provides. The woman can also use her age, experience, or educational background as additional tools for establishing a coaching style of supervision.

Some tips to help women supervisors take up the "coaching style" to determine the "pecking order" are as follows:

1. Find power in criticizing the man's work and not the man himself.
2. Assume the role of an expert with more knowledge than the subordinates.
3. Use a higher authority within the company to back your power and position. This can be top management, the HR department, or even company policies.
4. Develop a "friendship style" with other supervisors so that they do not try the coaching style with you.
5. Speak assertively and not aggressively or harshly.
6. Accept negative feedback and communication from the employees. In fact, a good coach is a good listener who uses the input to lead the team.