

Effective Managers and the Effect on Job Satisfaction

When a business places a person in a position of power, the person must assume a certain amount of responsibility for the level of job satisfaction of those whom they directly oversee and interact with on a regular basis. A 2017 report explained “[t]oxic bosses are, unsurprisingly, the top cause of unhappiness in the workplace. Half of employees have left their jobs to get away from a bad manager, according to a 2015 Gallup Survey...” [Gregoire]. I believe employee engagement can be used as a compass to determine the quality of management a team has within a company, and that job satisfaction cannot exist without effective management.

Job satisfaction and work-life balance were heavily stressed to me as I was onboarded at my last job working for an online retailing company. I was told about how the business strived to encourage employees to do the things that would make them happy, that there was flexible PTO and other benefits that were designed to give employees opportunities to achieve a good balance between work and home. This was essentially a start-up company and I was hired on at a wage lower than what I had been earning before I moved to Louisville, but decided to make it work as I was assured that there was ample opportunity for upward mobility once I got established in my role. Within six months, the company was sold to a larger corporation and our PTO and benefits were ripped out from under us. Within a year, we had been told that due to an unfavorable financial year and under the direction of the new corporation, we would not be getting raises or any kind of bonuses in the near future. Within two years of that, I was laid off along with the hundreds of other employees in my building.

As things deteriorated and our department began to shrink – we were losing many of our best professionals to jobs with better pay and benefits, and were told that it was not in the budget to refill those positions – there was a lot of speculation amongst my team about what was going to happen to our staff and the company as a whole. If I recall correctly, we went through two CEOs and lost about a dozen higher-up managers in the year before the layoff, and that would not be including those that were let go in a round of layoffs resulting from the

original acquisition. Before the announcement that we were being laid off and the subsequent announcement that the corporation that had purchased us two years prior was selling the company off again, a toxic attitude began to sweep through the studio in which I worked, and it should have been the biggest red flag of all.

I know that wages, benefits, and work-life balance are all important amenities to list in order to impress on a new hire or recruit, but now I am aware that they are in no way a good compass to determine how you may feel about your job as you become established. Having ineffectual managers will impact your workday in a much more profound way than earning a low wage ever will. I have worked for a man that would not promote women because he “didn’t trust them to make good decisions” (this was reported to HR, who said they could not act on hearsay). I’ve worked for a manager that would bring politics into the workplace, which resulted in favoritism to those who would listen and agree, cultivating a very toxic environment of Yes-Men. And I’ve worked for the petty manager that spread gossip as a tactic to motivate employees to outperform each other, or distributed punishments that far outweighed the acts they were attempting to quash.

If good leadership impacts job satisfaction by creating a more cohesive and effective team, then bad leadership must do the same with the opposite effect. In discussing the four management functions, our book describes a leader as someone who must inspire and influence, but I feel that effective leadership is far more complicated than that – even the situations that call for a task-oriented leadership style should also require a certain amount of relationship-oriented style. I would argue that in pursuing leadership, people skills relating to emotion and communication are the most important skills a manager can have – without the means to actually connect in a meaningful way with your team and those whose work you rely on, there isn’t much of a team to begin with, just some people that happen to work within proximity of one another. [Kinicki Williams, 5-10, 484-6]

You can be a good manager in the sense that you have well-developed conceptual and technical skills, but without also possessing effective soft skills, a manager will severely lack what it takes to communicate with their team and promote cooperation. I think our book rightly identifies good human skills as the most difficult to develop. A manager that perhaps

does not have the technical skills knowledge of their team, but possesses the soft skills is still able to create a better share of information, bringing people together to solve problems rather than multiplying the number of problems that exist. And if the seeds of soft skills aren't already a part of one's toolbox, how does one even go about changing an entire aspect of their personality to gain them? [Kinicki Williams, 23-25]

When things began to deteriorate at my last job, we did not have any good leadership to look to for answers or guidance because the problem was the leadership (or, the lack thereof). There was such turnover, turmoil, and lack of structure that when an issue arose, we were unsure of who we were supposed to reach out to for assistance. Incidents would be reported to Human Resources, which was affected by a round of layoffs, resulting in numerous files of reports vanishing from our system – there was not an effective way in place for us to share our grievances with anyone that might listen. I soon found myself dreading to even get up in the morning to go to work, and would carry the burden of anger and stress right out the door and into my home every evening.

Workplace stress and toxic environments are literally making workers sick – it is reported that “[m]any of the workplace exposures are as harmful to people as secondhand smoke in terms of their effects on self-reported physical health [and] mental health...”, and can drive people to health-averse behaviors such as overeating, drinking, and illicit drugs. The effects of a bad workplace then get passed on to the employer, with employees that are more likely to perform poorly or leave the company altogether (Sollinger). Several studies have also underlined how toxic attitudes at work spread to others like a virus and ultimately end up being very costly to businesses in the form of poor performance or turnover [Kinicki Williams, 376]. It is safe to say that if a work environment is affecting employees in such an impactful way, it would be in a business' best interest to be very invested in identifying the root cause of animus, and the sense to intervene when necessary lest their operation suffer.

I believe that the first step to correcting course in any bad environment would be to start from the top – to ensure that a team doesn't just have leadership that is invested in improving the situation, but also the means to express concerns if their needs are not being met. Trickle-down economics may not work, but an environment of trickle-down management

just might. Our book describes how much effective leadership matters, and that companies are responding by investing more money in leadership training, and not just for those at the very top. Leadership at all levels of a company should be considered, especially those who interact directly with their staff on a daily basis [Kinicki Williams, 466]. “Good managers create value,” our book states, in explaining the cascading effect a manager who is a positive influence can have on a business, and therefore highlighting what a valuable asset an effective manager can be [Kinicki Williams, 6].

I suppose the takeaway I have after reflecting on the kind of leadership I have experienced in the past and what I am learning in this class is that I hope when I am gainfully employed again and assume a leadership role, I will take my better understanding of effective management and make a positive impact on my team and workplace. Throughout our book, the authors speak to characteristics and skills that a good manager will foster – that they should be efficient and effective, but also knowledgeable in their field, achievement-oriented, and adept in soft skills from communication to conflict resolution – admittedly quite a bit to ask of one person, but someone hoping to be an exemplary manager should certainly be up to the task.

Resources

Gregoire, Carolyn. "How Your Toxic Boss Is Hurting Your Mental Health." *The Huffington Post*, TheHuffingtonPost.com, 10 Jan. 2017, www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/bad-boss-mental-health_us_5873b3fee4b043ad97e4a444.

Kinicki, Angelo, and Brian K. Williams. *Management: a Practical Introduction*. 8th ed., McGraw-Hill Education, 2018.

Sollinger, Marc. "The Health Risks of a Toxic Workplace." *Public Radio International*, Health: Innovation Hub, 22 May 2018, 9:30 AM, www.pri.org/stories/2018-05-22/health-risks-toxic-workplace.