Resolving People Issues Effectively

Changes is sometimes necessary whenever people work together. Equipment problems pale in significance compared to problems caused by people. A person cannot be discarded unemotionally just as a broken piece of equipment would. People problems are often difficult to solve. On the other hand, solving people problems offers immense personal satisfaction and professional benefits.

A simple procedure helps to analyze and pinpoint the nature of a problem affecting one or more team members:

- Examine the environment. Are physical conditions in the work environment adequate? Check lighting, equipment, temperature, availability of tools and supplies, and all other comfort and convenience factors that apply. If any physical element of the work environment is adversely affecting productivity, correct it so people can concentrate fully on their professional function. The emotional environment is also primarily a leadership responsibility. To create a positive environment, keep lines of communication open. Provide clear job descriptions and delegate authority to carry out assignments appropriately. Make sure you give adequate feedback and recognition. If the environment is adequate, consider the next step.

- Evaluate team member skills. Is the individual capable of doing the job? If necessary, skills are absent, consider whether or not additional training would correct the problem. If so, provide opportunity for the team member to receive that training. If training would not help, then this person and the job are incompatible and a new job assignment is necessary. If the environment and the team member's skills are adequate, consider the two remaining steps.

- Check activity. Make two types of checks on activity: the type of activity and the level of activity. Check whether activities are the right ones for the purpose of the job. Then determine whether the person is actually working hard enough and long enough. Productivity will be low when either of these indicators is out of line. If there is an activity problem, you know that it is related to either skills or motivation.

- Examine motivation. If the environment is adequate, if the team member is capable of performing the work, and if the individual is working at the right task but not being very productive, the problem is probably one of motivation. Look at the attitudes of the team member, the enthusiasm, and the level of commitment to the goals of the organization. Many problems are problems of motivation. When a person is motivated, the other problems are usually easily resolved. If a person is not motivated, no number of skills or activity will permanently resolve the problem.

- Seek out the needs of the team member that can be used as a basis for motivating that person to become more productive. If you conclude that the problem lies in the area of motivation, do whatever is necessary to lead the team member to adopt new attitudes. Never automatically assume that more money is the solution to all motivation problems. Actually, a team member whose productivity is unsatisfactory is already overpaid. More money may depress productivity even more because it delivers the illogical message that present inadequate performance deserves a reward.

Finding a solution to a motivation problem begins with establishing a positive personal relationship as a basis for discovering the needs that are presently important to the employee. This may take time. Team members who know you are dissatisfied with their performance find it difficult to confide in you about any personal needs or problems. Remember that low productivity is only a symptom; you must find the underlying problem. Consider these possible causes of people problems:

- Boredom with the work and the need for some change

- Frustration with work that is not challenging enough
- Physical or emotional problems that need professional attention
- Stress from family problems
- Discouragement because of overwhelming workload
- Inability to connect work on the job to achievement of personal life goals
- Perceived lack of opportunity for advancement or recognition in current position

Once you discover the underlying cause of the problem, you can develop and carry out a plan to solve it.