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## **MANAGERS ARE JUST TOO SENSITIVE ABOUT THEIR POWER**

## **MANY MANAGERS ARE FIGHTING THE WRONG BATTLES WHEN THEY DEAL WITH THEIR EMPLOYEES**

## **WHEN MANAGERS HAVE TO USE THEIR POWER, THE BATTLE IS ALREADY LOST**

In the 20 odd years we have had the privilege of working with organisations and their people, we have now and then taken the liberty of stepping back to understand what is making them work...or not. We have distilled from these moments a few key thoughts around managing employees.

The first in this series of provocations deals with Power and its cancerous repercussions in organisations.

Our observation is that far too many managers are focussed on holding and wielding power as a critical tool. When faced with conflict or resistance they look to the consequences to their position should they relent or compromise. They presume the important thing is to show who's in charge. They determine that to back off is a loss for the company, a victory for the employee, the enemy.

So often organisational conflict is not about the actual issue that is causing discomfort, but about the perceived balance of power.

We have seen so often that the moment the focus is on power, then the real issue, to find solutions that keep the stakeholders tuned into the business, and the business on track, becomes polluted. Labour Relations is full of conflict over who won or lost the battle, when the war is being lost anyway. Managers can win as many battles as they like against their employees. Until they recognise that the real war is that of managers and their workers against the competition or marketplace, they will continue to fight, possibly even win, the wrong battles, and so continue to lose the war!

How do we get past this?

Take comfort that the power of the manager is institutionalised. There is no need to prove it, or negotiate for it. It is intrinsic to the employment relationship. The challenge only arises when he or she tries to wield it! Most conflict in organisations is about some stakeholder trying to wield power. The manager is the authorised representative of the company and is accountable for ensuring the ongoing success of the team. He who is accountable must have the authority. The two concepts are mutually inseparable. There is no need to debate over who has the right to decide. The real trick is over making

decisions that have consensus, that find the support and the energy of the team. For through this the issue of power is removed.

But when consensus cannot be found, the manager must decide on the basis of the best interests of the company. For this reason there is never a need to argue with employees. There is only a need to listen and seek out ways to accommodate their input and their interests, to take their views seriously, and respect and have care for their perspectives. Once this is done, and those needs accommodated or at the least considered, then the manager must be bold enough to make a decision that addresses the organisation's goals and values.

And it is your job as the manager to take the first steps in getting the team to focus on a common goal, to understand we are all on the same team, to take the issue of power off the table. You have the accountability, you have the authority, and you therefore have the obligation to set the standard and the pace. The real debate is not about your rights, it's about your methods.

True organisational growth arises not when power is balanced, but when power is removed as a factor from the employment relationship.

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