The Changing Role Of Today's Managers

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All that has changed. A manager's job is no longer that of a watchdog, policeman, or slave driver. Managers must be able to shape a more supportive work environment and find ways to help each employee be more productive.

New workers

One of the reasons for this shift is the changing demographics of today's workforce. The explosion of two-wage-earner families has taken a toll on family life. Having a greater number of non-traditional families with single parents has added to this stress.

Also, younger employees--the post-Baby Boomers--are entering the workforce in droves. These younger employees have very different work and life values that have been shaped in partial reaction to the values of their parents. While their parents became slaves to their jobs and careers, today's younger workers are much more interested in jobs which have meaning and a larger purpose than just getting a paycheck.

If these workers' needs are not reflected in the workplace, they are quick to find another work environment that is more in sync with who they are. This is true even in tough economic times because they are also more willing to forego the trappings of material success.

These new values are reflected in the recent National Study of the Changing Workforce that was conducted by the Families and Work Institute in New York. The top three variables that some 3,400 randomly selected men and women considered to be most important in deciding to take their current job were: 1) open communication, 2) effect on personal/family life, and 3) the nature of work.

How to manage today

What do these changes mean for managers? The expectation is clear: employees want a more caring supportive management style, and they are willing to forego other aspects of a job--including salary considerations--to get it.

Open communication. Provide people with what you know, when you know it--especially when it may affect their jobs. Information about company finances, new products, competitive practices, and pending changes in policies are all of interest to most employees. Involve employees in decisions that affect them--or better yet--whenever possible let them make the decisions themselves.
Effect on personal/family life. Find new ways to allow for greater flexibility and autonomy in individual jobs. I'm always surprised, for example, how some managers insist that every one of their workers be on the job at exactly 8:30 a.m. and work a prescribed number of hours, with any deviation requiring advance permission. Isn't it more important for your employees to be at 100% when they are there? A little flexibility in working hours can go a long way in assuring some piece of mind--and better focus--while at work.

The nature of work. Give meaning to work. Although you can't easily change what your company does as a business, you can have a big impact on the individual context of how every employee sees his or her job.

Let employees know why what they do is important to your company and to providing value to your customers. Allow them the opportunities to develop skills that can make them more valuable employees.

Constantly let your employees know that you appreciate their efforts in as many ways as possible. Everyone needs to feel valued and everyone wants to be recognized for the job they have done.

As the architect Mies van der Rohe said, “God is in the details.” And the details of managing today are moving toward finding ways to better help and support the people who are serving your customers and keeping you in business.