Just to be clear…

Your employees want to do more

Are you surprised? Well…you will be pleasantly surprised at the positive effect you can create in your workplace by simply asking your employees for their input about how they do their jobs.

Mergers and acquisitions, deregulation and economic turbulence all have the same result. Companies must do more with less. But how do you get more out of an already stretched, stressed and overworked workforce?

Our simple answer may surprise you: Ask your employees to look at their own workflow.

Employees learn what works in a job and what doesn't while they're doing it. There's simply no substitute for experience. And, employees have an opinion about what can be done to improve a job. The problem is, we rarely ask the people who do the work. Instead we tell them what changes are "happening" to their jobs. As a result, they feel uninvolved and often resentful. Accordingly, the changes are not as successful as they could be.

However, when your staff believes that they have some ownership over the changes to their jobs, they will develop effective changes and make those changes work!

If you haven't asked your staff for their input in the past, they will be reserved at first when they share information. In fact, they may be sceptical about the whole process. Because of that, it is better to have a third party do the asking on your behalf. This allows your staff the freedom to respond to an objective person who is not affected by corporate history or politics. They know though that you are really doing the asking.

The process starts with a face-to-face interview in the person's workplace so you can see the environment they work in and the types of interruptions they get. And that information is important in understanding today's process. The interview is all about asking, looking and listening – asking what they do and how they do it, looking at their environment and the examples they show you, and listening, really listening to what they tell you.

Notes are taken and questions are asked to make sure the correct information is collected. Copies of all documents used in the process are collected. In many cases that also means gathering copies of input screens. The information is then prepared in a flowchart that allows the staff to see both the big picture and the details at the same time. Copies of documents used to perform the job are displayed below the flowchart.

Questions are then asked to confirm that the flowchart is correct. Only when you have a clear baseline of today can you plan changes for tomorrow. The third party "facilitator" also needs to understand the corporate goals and objectives so they can ensure that the new processes align with those goals and objectives.

The next step is to conduct a brainstorming meeting by looking at today's (the AS IS) process and asking the staff what can be done to improve the process. Ideas are collected and a new flowchart is prepared to show TO BE process. This TO BE flowchart represents how the staff would like their processes to work. Another meeting is then held with the staff so they can review their recommendations in context.

The final step is to sell the recommendations to management. The approved report becomes the action plan for both staff and management. The staff will make sure the plan gets implemented because they helped create it. So…ask your staff and you'll be very surprised at the results.

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