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Get Zapped...

The Fifth in a series of An Executive Summary for Busy Managers.

We have reached the halfway point in our series. Hopefully our fifth executive summary will accomplish the goal of offering you greater value than your time investment cost. I hope it also provides you with some thought provoking points that will make a positive impact on your organization. It's that time... Starbucks has a new blend out and hopefully you will partake.

I promised myself that I would not start out with a static electricity joke. However, I guarantee you that if they had tried to originally release this book in the midst of electrostatic discharge (ESD) awareness week it would have been hilarious. The book is titled Zapp! The Lightning of Empowerment, but we will call it Zapp for short. William Byham and Jeff Cox authored this book. Byham and Cox do an excellent job of keeping the book fast paced and interesting. The story revolves around castles and dragons and lightning bolts... I think maybe these guys might have played a little too much Dungeons and Dragons while working on their dissertations. Anyway, it puts an interesting spin on the story

The story of Zapp can be summed up in one word but if I did that there would be nothing left to fill the page... just kidding. Empowerment is what Zapp is all about. Empowerment is a big, bold word. It makes employees cheer and managers clasp their org charts in fear of having to relinquish control. In fact, just the opposite is true. If implemented correctly, empowerment can be used to get employees to do more work and free up the managers so they have more time for leadership activities. This may seem shocking (no pun intended... okay maybe just a little pun intended) but given some time and effort Zapp can work. The sticky portion of empowerment is in how it is implemented.

Zapp was written almost 20 years ago but every tip and trick contained within the writing can certainly be implemented today. The first big idea that is put forth is that empowerment cannot be flipped on like a light switch (oops). A manager cannot just suddenly walk into a staff meeting and declare freedom from oppressive supervisory activities. Instead, empowerment has to be introduced slowly.

Empowerment can work, but first the manager has to get over the stigma of not asking employees for help solving problems. As a matter of fact, the best way to slowly introduce empowerment is to ask your employees for their ideas on how to solve problems affecting the organization. This does not mean that you put up a little "suggestions" box outside of your office. In order to take the first step you will have to listen to what the employees have to say. You can bet that you will have to listen to some pretty terrible ideas. You will, at first, consider this a colossal waste of your time. To make matters even worse, you will have to think about and form a rational response as to why an idea may not make the most sense. But this is the key, if you don't take

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the time to respond to your employees about the difficulties of implementing their ideas, they will not learn how to improve their offerings **BEFORE** bringing them to your office.

The second big idea offered in Zapp is goal setting and measurement. Allowing employees to measure their output against a goal will let them know how well they are doing. The idea of keeping score is supposed to spark (sorry) an intrinsic competitive motivation. By allowing employees to directly compete with their peers or maybe more politically correctly, their own previous scores, you can increase their output. However, careful attention must be paid by the managers to the process of goal setting. It is imperative that quality of output is as important as quantity otherwise you can imagine the big pile of dragon dung that could begin to form.

This sounds like another case of management metrics. Well, it is. After all, the old saying rings pretty true... you get what you measure/manage. However, this pushes metrics down to the individual employee level. Common sense tells us that fancy charts and graphs like those presented in staff meetings will not be very efficient. Therefore, it is up to the manager to develop an effective and efficient measurement technique. Hmm... seems like a prime opportunity for getting employees involved with solving an organizational issue.

In this day and age increased efficiencies are paramount to success. No organization can afford to waste a minute, especially when the domestic cost per minute is equivalent to an overseas company's cost per hour. Employee output is a prime candidate for increased efficiencies. Zapp offers some excellent advice on how to super-charge (ouch) employee productivity.

Byham and Cox got together again in 1994 to write a book called HeroZ Empower Yourself, Your Coworkers, Your Company. HeroZ moves a little faster and is probably a better introductory volume with regard to empowerment. However, after reading HeroZ you will certainly want to read Zapp because it goes into a little bit more of the nuts and bolts of organization implementation.

Overall, empowerment can be a great opportunity or a horrendous failure. You must be committed to the idea because as a wise man once said, "what is given cannot be taken away." Once implemented, your employees will see how exciting and enjoyable their jobs can be. If you try to remove that, you will likely have a re-volt (last one) on your hands.

Just my opinion and we all know what "they" say about opinions...

Thanks

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