

# Management In Real Life

by Kevin Herring

How much more productive and profitable could an organization be if everyone acted in the interest of the business? Think about it. I would bet that most everyone can name experiences where they have been aware of major waste in an organization and seen little effort to correct it.

In my own experience, I've known managers of a utility company who became upset when their own linemen told them that excessive cable was thrown away with every spool. It turns out they didn't want to know about the waste. I was once told by a welder in a manufacturing plant that he could do more work each day, but he wouldn't because once he did, he would be expected to repeat it each day. Ironically, his supervisor felt he had to watch the welders every minute to keep them working. A union president once confided in me that if management ever acted like they cared about the business, the union membership might be willing to turn the place around. They had the capability, but no motivation. Over the years, countless workers have told me that they quit making suggestions because they were told to just do their jobs, or they were ignored altogether.

What's amazing is that for the last twenty years we have talked about team synergy and employee empowerment in corporate America. With all the hype, employees should be falling all over themselves to cut costs and operate more efficiently. So why don't they? Why does it only seem to happen in business magazines? I believe that, in many cases, it does occur only in the magazines; but not always.

Most workers say they would just like to do a decent job, feel like they're doing something productive with their time at work, and return home to enjoy the important things in life. But in traditional organizations, where management controls all information, resources, and decision-making, we find the employees too worn out to care. They're tired of dealing with management people, who, because they are held accountable for compliance rather than business results, often become caught up in a world of self-serving behaviors that divides departments and produces destructive in-fighting. Who would feel motivated in a place like this? But that's how many employees describe their experience every day at work.

Fortunately, not everyone has this experience. What shows up differently in many businesses is a structure that requires information, resources, and decision-making to be held and managed by those closest to the problems. Instead of holding people accountable for complying with policy, employees combine their efforts to make the business succeed. Workers understand they are part of a business that cools homes, allows computers to work, or provides nice clothing. They know who their competitors are and what they have to do to stay ahead in the marketplace.

Does it sound too good to be true? Consider your own experience. I've seen employees work many extra hours without pay because they felt accountable for a project; a store clerk who donated thirty-five cents to a customer who was short on a purchase; and assembly line workers who consistently met their own production targets well above those of management.

None of these examples ever showed up in a magazine to my knowledge. They were merely the result of organizations where employees cared about the business because they were part of the business, not a dispensable commodity used by the business.

Kevin Herring is President of Tucson-based Ascent Management Consulting, a firm specializing in individual, group, and organization effectiveness.

At Ascent we believe that organizations are only as successful as the systems that engage the individuals who work there. Ascent Management Consulting is committed to creating management, culture, organization, and governance systems that enable personal fulfillment and organization effectiveness.

Kevin can be reached at 520-742-7300, kevinh@ascentmgt.com, or [www.ascentmgt.com](http://www.ascentmgt.com).