

Management In Real Life

by Kevin Herring

"People work in the system; management creates the system " said W. Edward Deming, the renown quality genius.

If we accept Deming's premise, do we attribute poor business results to how people perform or the deficiencies of the system? To provide some insights, let's take a look at an experience a reader recently shared with me and guess where the problem lies. The account is presented in his words with names changed to protect the innocent *and* the guilty.

Sally wanted to have cable TV installed in our new house. While we were painting the house I cut the cable that was there to be able to paint the wall. When I contacted the cable company, I tried to tell them that we needed to have the cable repaired as well as installed. Unfortunately, there is no *repair and install* option on their computerized telephone system - you must choose *one* for *installation* or *two* for *repairs*. So I pushed *one* for *installation* and told the person who took the order my problem. (She did not handle repairs so it was not included on the installation order.)

An installation person came out while we were gone and hooked us up.

When I got home I found a note saying we were hooked up. I called the cable company to report that while we were hooked up, we could not watch TV because the end of the cable had been cut off. I chose the *repair* option this time. I explained that I had cut off the end of the cable and pulled it out of the wall in the front room because we wanted to paint. Besides, we wanted the cable put in upstairs. She asked if my TV picture screen was white and fuzzy. I said "No, it's not hooked up because there is no cable connection; I cut it off." She said she only did repairs and that she would send out a repair person. The repair person came out and told me that it was an installation issue and that he had only been given enough time points to do a repair, not an installation. He said, "It says here on the repair order that the picture screen is white and fuzzy." I told him to tell National Cable Company...

Anyway, we do not have cable TV.

By the way, they do not have a complaint option on their system. When I sent them an email explaining the problem, it was answered by someone in billing who said my problem had been sent on, but there was nothing else they could do.

Now that you've recovered from the hysteria, what do you think - people or system?

Fred went on to explain that the employees to whom he spoke about his problem sincerely wanted to do a good job and resented the system that prevented them from doing so. He described this apparent conflict as the "slayer of morale".

Deming would say that it's the system that drives people's work - enabling success or assuring failure. Too often we attribute failure to those laboring under an ineffective system and punish the people instead of identifying and correcting the real culprits.

Deming also said, "You can beat horses; they run faster for a while" suggesting that until we change the system, how much improvement can we honestly hope to attain?

Trying it on for fit: Spend some time examining your work systems. Begin by generating a list of key results for your department or work group in terms of productivity, cost, quality, customer service, time or other bottom line measure. You may want to involve people from other departments to help you with this.

Identify key results you are having the most difficulty achieving. Select one and together with line employees create a flow diagram of the work processes that impact the key result. (Information systems people can show you how to construct a flow diagram.) Have employees identify points at which problems arise that affect the success of the process. Make a list of actions and practices of management and employees, along with company policies that affect workers' ability to achieve results. Then develop solutions that alter or eliminate those practices and policies for greater effectiveness. Support employees as they

implement the solutions.

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