

# Management In Real Life

by Kevin Herring

What do you do when you have a work group with so many problems you throw up your hands in despair?

Joe, a team member, is a walking black hole for information; He takes it all in but never shares anything. There's Jan whose complaining resembles a squeaky violin in a continuous one note song. Sally and Alyssa engage the cone of silence whenever the other is around despite the fact that they work in back-to-back cubicles. Not surprisingly, they don't get along.

## How do I cope? Let me count the ways...

We've all met up with at least one dysfunctional work group like this one. Despite learning to play bongos together, appreciate each other's differences, and communicate with tact, the department seemed destined for the distinction, *problem child*.

Relying on training for nearly everything, we find ourselves prey to the propagandists who insist that every problem can be solved by educating people. If employees are taught what to do, they'll just do it, right? Wrong. We learned long ago that organization change requires more than training.

## Even the best...

A colleague once called me from his showcase company that shared many magazine covers touting huge amounts of training for hourly

workers. He had an employee problem and couldn't figure out why more training had the team in tears begging for relief. To make matters worse, the problem persisted. Why? Because the problem wasn't about awareness or skill. Like our misfit team described above, the problem was willingness to change.

Although training is a key ingredient for overall success, plugging in a video and following an instructor script doesn't solve many willingness issues. What does help is understanding the core issues influencing behavior and confronting them.

### **The road less traveled...**

For example, a work team that didn't communicate well and constantly complained about the manager turned itself around when employees accepted ownership for team production. Suddenly they found ways to share information and deal with the manager's quirks.

Another group of employees, refusing to cooperate with support staff, created bottlenecks that delayed services to customers and increased costs. New computers and streamlined processes had no impact. Once the issues were identified and put on the table, employees were faced with a choice. By choosing to be accountable for results they were able to improve customer service and reduce costs significantly.

Like a lot of corporate band aid solutions, training can be quick, easy, and relatively painless. But if you don't have an ear for squeaky violins or appreciate the occasional cone of silence, you'll have to take the tough road of challenging behaviors and choices.

It's not as much fun as playing bongos. But that's okay if when

dealing with willingness issues you want more results than rhythm.

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**Trying it on for fit:** When employees and teams struggle to work together to achieve goals it's often caused by employees not acting in the interest of the whole group or organization. Employees may allow personal differences, insecurities, selfishness and other distractions to interfere with the work because they haven't chosen to be accountable.

To address employee willingness issues, start by gathering enough information to obtain a clear picture of what's going on that prevents success and why. Describe to the employee or group what is occurring and the impact it's having on group success. Confront the issue directly and challenge beliefs and practices that contribute to problems. Define the choices and potential consequences, and invite the employee or employees to choose.

Send an e-mail and let me know what you learn from your experiences. I would love to hear from you!

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***Kevin Herring is President of Ascent Management Consulting. Ascent specializes in creating business solutions through effective management, workplace cultures and organization systems. Kevin can be reached at 520-742-7300, kevinh@ascentmgt.com or www.ascentmgt.com.***

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