CIRCUSES AND OPERAS – PART 1

ABSTRACT

Redefining management's role and achieving the best from employees. Part 1

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Circuses and Operas – Part 1

Introduction

I write this based on my experiences within multiple sectors of industry. I have worked for great companies and those of much lesser quality. I have worked for companies whose employee retention rates were, at best, fifty percent and others who achieved ninety percent or better. The question, "What is the company's and management's role regarding employee retention, and how do we obtain the best results from employees?" requires examination. I believe upper management needs to set the standards and expectations for employees while leading by example. Managers need to be engaging, genuine, positively challenging, to demonstrate trust without micromanaging.

I strongly believe a paradigm shift among management and leaders is necessary, regardless of sector. Employees' judge a company based on experiences once the honeymoon period has passed, sometimes much sooner. Employees make one of two conclusions: the first is, "I will work here until something better comes along" (The Circus, Part 1); the second is, "I like their core values, and they value me, so I'll stay" (The Opera, Part 2).

The Circus, Part 1

Circuses are created when managers destroy trust, destroy respect, micromanage, and claim credit for solutions which were not their own. How are trust and respect destroyed? By saying one thing and doing something contrary to the statement or policy. Poor managers enjoy micromanaging because it provides a false sense of control and domination while inflating their own ego.

For example, a division manager spent a great deal of time creating a progress measurement tool for projects. I was using the tool late one night (not long after starting work for this company), and realized it had multiple defects which produced an unintended results. While updating the results that night, I fixed the errors and sent the results to my division manager. I believed he would not see the report until morning. However, shortly after sending the material, I received a terse message from the manager instructing me to undo all my corrections. He then instructed me to separately identify each change and resubmit for his approval … one at a time. I complied. You can imagine the conclusions and realizations I drew about the manager, and the company.

In another example, as a project manager on a large industrial project, the company I was working for spent vast sums of money developing Change Management Policy and Procedures. The client had issued specifications for the project, a very large, six-volume set issued during the design basis stage. The construction manager and I were the only two people to read the entire series. My team crafted excellent plans for execution, risk management, infrastructure plan, budget estimate, the fully loaded construction schedule based on the specifications and other necessary documents. Everything was built around finishing ahead of schedule. Detailed presentations were given to the owner/client and we had answers for every question they asked. The company for which I worked had created the estimate for the project from the home office after the project team had built our documents. Asked to attend the corporate review with 25 of the most senior personnel from multiple divisions, the construction manager and I complied. During the review, both of us asked serious detailed questions but did not receive what we believed to be the correct answers. By this time, it was evident nobody in the home office has read the entire series of client specifications or if they had, failed to pay attention to the

details within the specifications. Eventually, I stood and addressed the boardroom, stating that if they submitted the bid as crafted, they would lose their shorts. This was a lump-sum project with very clear directions regarding changes and pricing. Upon completion of the review, I was pulled aside, out of earshot of other personnel, and told I asked too many direct questions and was out of line in expecting direct answers. The company's strategy was to lowball the estimate, believing they could make up the difference on change orders, despite this methodology being counter to their Change Management Policy and Procedures and the client's specifications. Despite stopping the company from making huge catastrophic multi-million dollar errors, my overachieving team of performers was disbanded. How do you think my team and I felt based on their actions as we were shuffled off to vastly underutilized, unfulfilling positions? As a side note, the company was never able to perform to the same level or achievement as demonstrated in the field.

In a final example, while contracted to an Engineering, Procurement, Construction Management firm as a construction manager, I was assigned to a nice challenging project, which had the full range of scope and relatively short construction duration. I was asked to create an inclusive execution plan, and did so. The document was reviewed by the home office construction manager, client, and company President.

Days before leaving for the site, the President calls me into his office (first time, despite having many conversations in hallways and such), I arrived not knowing what to expect. He commends the plan, states that I know what I am doing, then says he is not going to tell me what or how to do things. Further, stating, I am a very intelligent man and he expects great things. It turned out to be a great meeting and I am walking on cloud nine after leaving his office. Then I am summoned to the home office construction manager's office. The meeting lasts about five minutes. Despite acknowledging the work, depth, and scope, he instructs me to, "Throw the plan up on the shelf, nobody will read it." Meeting over. He intentionally undermined the company's President and his directions. The home office construction manager personally directs the project from the office, never setting foot on site and daily undermines every known principle and practice of good project management, including refusing to accept valuable unbiased advice. What is the lesson to be learned?

Conclusion

The previous section identifies examples of how and why companies do not keep employees. Conflicting agendas do exist, which erode core company foundational elements. Companies do not recognize and utilize talented people. Egos kill productivity and reduce profit margins.

Lessons learned from example #1; Trust, respect, integrity, and value destroyed. Not walking the talk.

Lessons learned from example #2; Trust, respect, integrity, and value destroyed besides the company's willingness to forsake and ignore their policies, processes, and procedures. A definite disconnect between statements and actions.

Lessons learned from example #3; Trust, respect, integrity, and value destroyed in addition to counter-productive people intentionally undermining their bosses. Company core values destroyed.

The Opera, Part 2

See Circuses and Operas – Part 2