

# Good Leaders Know What Motivates

Friday, February 20, 2009

Jacksonville Business Journal - by Dolly Penland Correspondent

What makes a good boss? One trait might be to take to heart the old adage “Know thyself.”

Though many managers think of themselves as effective and compassionate leaders, asking around the office might elicit a different evaluation.

“So many people think they’re doing a good job, but if you ask the staff, you get a terrible response,” said Jerry Osteryoung, director of outreach for the Jim Moran Institute in the College of Business at Florida State University.

To address this dichotomy in perceptions, Osteryoung recommends managers do a 360-degree evaluation. “Have superiors, colleagues and subordinates evaluate you,” he said. “It gives a better picture of how you’re doing. It clears up the disconnect.”

Good leaders know those they lead. Osteryoung said a good manager needs to respect staff and understand they have lives outside of work.

“A great manager has to have empathy,” he said. “Everyone needs different things, and it’s your job as manager to figure out what motivates that person to be successful. It’s not a manager’s job to make herself successful. It’s to make her staff successful.”

It’s also important to tailor one’s management style to individuals. “A great manager figures out what motivates an employee and treats each one as if they are special and unique,” said Steve Waterhouse, president of **Predictive Results**, which uses the Predictive Index, a behavioral and personality assessment tool. “Many employees are motivated by money, but others are inspired by other things.”

Assessment tools can provide a better understanding of personality types in a company and how they fit together. Having a personality assessment done themselves can also help business owners and other leaders in an organization understand their strengths and weaknesses, which in turn will help them better lead and interact with employees.

“You can take all the manager training courses to learn all the best techniques, but until you have insight into yourself and the people you are leading, you can’t be an effective leader,” Waterhouse said.

For example, he said there are two types of people in meetings: those who “wing it” — creative thinkers who can brainstorm on the fly — and those who need a day or two of planning time, to ruminate on goals in order to come up with their best ideas.

“Good leaders understand these things and adapt to get the best from each individual,” Waterhouse said. “Sometimes you need to [pull the more introverted thinkers] aside and say, ‘I need your ideas on this issue. Think it over and get back to me.’ ”

It’s also important for good managers to recognize good work. “It’s not a glib comment,” Osteryoung said. “It’s honest and it has to be timely: ‘I read your report and you did a great job and this is how this report makes a difference to the company.’ ”

A good manager will also make every effort to maintain open, honest lines of communication. “Especially in today’s environment where people are so fearful of losing their jobs,” Osteryoung said. If a manager is pressed about job security, saying something along the lines of “Layoffs are always possible, but nothing is definite. As soon as I know, you’ll know,” is much better than “I don’t know.”

Good leaders also listen. “In my behavioral style, I tend to be quick to move onto the next thing and not be heavy on the details,” Waterhouse said. “My Web developer is exactly the opposite, so I said, ‘Slow me down and ask [for more information], otherwise I will assume that you know what I mean.’ I give them permission to understand me and communicate at that level.”

Good leaders also set up their employees to succeed. To help do this, Richard Brock, an accountant and chairman of the board of **The LBA Group**, uses the Predictive Index at all levels of the company.

“We use it for all new hires,” he said. “We know certain personality types such as an accountant, bookkeeper or those in administration fit certain patterns. The Predictive Index helps us to hire people who will be successful in that position. It’s less stressful for them if they’re hired for a job that they’re best suited for, and as a leader, if your people are happy, it’s easy to lead.”