

THE CEO AGENDA 7

Management styles: Management by walking around as an option.

One of the most critical aspects that affect a company's performance as a whole and of its constituents is the overall ambiance in the workplace. Many organizations reach a plateau of evolution and growth primarily due to an environment of fear, resentment, and lack of trust. When the higher-ranking officers in a company handle difficult situations and poor results or any other “under pressure” circumstances by questioning collaborators, offering angry recriminations, and demeaning staff in public, they achieve an environment of intimidation and distrust. When this happens, people tend to withhold information, particularly bad news, stop presenting ideas freely and spontaneously, and eventually may even jump ship.

Managers often try to escape the image of wrongdoing when dealing with people. The rules and the book drive them. However, they tend to simplify the fact that the issue is not the rule but how they deal with it and colleagues who may have overlooked it. It is the style and the delivery more than the content. Due to research-generated evidence, this approach of management by coercion is giving way to emotional intelligence as a leadership approach.

Poor communication and the silence of middle management can devastate a company. When a collaborative employee does not share ideas or opinions with their superiors due to fear, the decisions of that

manager suffer because he has a skewed view of what is going on in the organization and with the marketplace. In real life, employees facing a boss with fear suffer physical reactions that impair their contributions. These are categorized as toxic encounters that tend to alienate employees.

The obvious question is, what to do?

Many things can be done. For example, allow middle managers to fight back and give them a tool to do it with. The idea of the GLEs (Grupos de Liderazgo Extendido) is precisely that. Also, managers may accept the value of change and may try the kind-and-gentle approach. It is incredible how it works.

There are other ways, such as management by walking around and listening (MBWAL). This is a technique that is aimed at developing positive employee relationships, very much like the open-door policy. It is a means of promoting effective two-way communication between employees and managers.

Two-way communication programs are designed to allow effective and responsible information to flow between employees and management. The success of such a program is based on the ability to achieve and control some conditions.

- Honest, frank, and open communication is viewed to achieve company goals and not undermine authority and control.
- Managers recognize and accept that employees can offer insights into day-to-day activities that may lead to better decisions.
- Managers seek opportunities to talk to employees to establish a better rapport, which will encourage employees to share information.
- When employees are asked for input, managers listen carefully and act on their offer.

- Every question is answered promptly.
- Employees do not have the fear of speaking with their boss or with their boss's boss.

MBWAL is a simple management process with tremendous business benefits if done correctly and consistently. When MBWAL is done erroneously or poorly, adverse consequences may result.

From a management point of view, what you do is as follows:

- Get out and walk all spaces several times a month. Walk unannounced. You do not necessarily have to talk to everyone; you want to be seen and show interest.
- Listen open-mindedly; this is not the time to pass criticism. This is the time to exercise the difference between the mechanics of hearing and the intellectual aspects of “active listening.”
- Process information, identify trends and recurring themes, and “get back to you” commitments, follow up on issues, etc.
- Communicate vertically and horizontally, and make sure that those (in a broad sense) who need to get the information will get it.
- Feedback: provide indicators openly throughout the organization that communication is working; introduce new programs like a “face to face” program actively; make sure others walk as well. “Cross-walking and listening” between areas is very powerful.
- Never quit. It's a self-replenishing process; the energizer is that MBWAL is the right thing to do.