# Successful Supervisor Part 97

## *The Myth of Needing More People*

## by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

This article will contain a philosophy that some people will reject out of hand, yet I believe it is generally true, with perhaps a handful of exceptions.  The myth starts when workers and their supervisors are convinced they are being overtaxed and need the assistance of more workers in order to get the work done. This complaint is present in the majority of organizations in which I have worked over the past 30 years.

The irony is that when you listen to supervisors and managers describe conditions for the workers, they readily admit there is a lot of lost time that could be available if conditions were changed.  My own personal estimate is that in the average organization today, companies are getting between 30-50% of the potential that is there in the current workforce. If that estimate is true, then in many organizations the output could be roughly doubled with the current workforce.

The problem is that people are working around the cultural problems and conflicts that exist in any group of people. I contrast this condition with some of the benchmark organizations I have seen where leaders have built a culture of respect and trust.  In those organizations, I believe workers freely contribute nearly 80% of what they can possibly do.  That is about the maximum amount people can sustain without experiencing health problems due to burn out.

The antidote for supervisors is to not accept when people complain that they need more bodies around.  Instead, seek to engage the existing workforce to a higher degree.  If you build the right kind of culture, there will be a lot less internal friction causing loss of productivity.  People will enjoy a higher quality of work life as well, which will make your days (or nights) at work so much more pleasant.

Ask yourself if a better culture in your organization would make for a happier and more productive experience for all levels.  Don't be quick to buy into the notion that we need to dump more bodies into a sick system in order to get the work done.  It is just not true in the vast majority of cases. If you dump more bodies in without resolving the underlying cause of malcontent, then the problem gets worse, not better.

Instead, seek to energize the people you already have by reducing the friction or fighting between people. This action will result in better utilization of current resources and obviate the need to hire more people.  Try the following techniques:

**Create a common goal**

Teams who have a lot of acrimony usually act that way because they lack a common goal that everyone wants. Seek to clarify your vision and paint a picture that is clear enough for all employees to grasp.  Show them how each one of them will be much better off when the vision is achieved. Remind them that they are really on the same team and not in opposing silos.

Get rid of the "we versus they" feelings and create a powerful group that think in terms of "us." If you are not an expert at making this kind of change, then seek a consultant that can help you.

**Document expected behaviors**

Work with your employees to establish a set of agreed-upon behaviors that remove the vast majority of acrimony between people.  Make sure everyone buys into these behaviors. Then praise people when they follow the right behaviors.  Do not tolerate it when people violate the behaviors. This action may result in actually removing some players from the team.

I have written elsewhere (Addition by Subtraction) about how removing some of the combative people who refuse to cooperate actually makes the work easier for everyone else, and you get a double whammy.  You get more work accomplished with fewer people! In this environment everyone celebrates. The group will recognize that you did not need more people; rather you needed fewer people who are mucking up the works.

**Celebrate the Successes**

Getting to improved engagement and empowerment can be a long road.  Be sure to take time to celebrate the small wins along the way.  Let the team marvel in their ability to actually be more productive without killing themselves.  Celebrate creative ideas that pan out to improve the process.  Consider failures as learning experiences that help the team move forward. Remind people that they learned to walk only by a lot of falling down and then making corrections.

Mark Joyner teaches a technique he calls "High Impact Minimal Effort or HIME™" that encourages people to find ways to improve productivity while minimizing the effort it takes. The idea is to create a mindset that always looks at jobs this way; it becomes a habit that leads to individual and corporate success.

Once you create a culture where people get jazzed about making their own improvements, then you can simply fall into a coaching mode where their own power and ideas will supply the fuel to the engine of productivity.

*This is a part in a series of articles on "Successful Supervision." The entire series can be viewed on* www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision *or on this blog.*

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