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A Manager's Role in Obtaining a Fair Day's Work for a Fair Day's Pay — Part I[1]

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Introduction

Please answer the following question: Nearly all associates will do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay when their leader develops and maintains an appropriate work atmosphere.

Agree __________ Disagree __________

How did you answer this question? The statement "a fair day's work for a fair day's pay" suggests that both the associate and manager have a role to play. What is a fair day's work for a fair day's pay anyway? Before we share our thoughts on this, take a moment to consider the role managers play in helping associates put forth a "fair day's pay."

Managers and supervisors often have more influence over the productivity of their associates than they realize. Although the labor market is showing some signs of loosening, inappropriate management beliefs and practices can cause associates to put forth a productivity level that can be best described as "I will do just enough to get by" (or potentially even less). ["After all, if I get fired from this job, it is relatively easy to find another one that pays just as much."] Obviously, in today's exceedingly competitive marketplace, an associate who attempts to "just get by" will not result in management receiving a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

Eight Agree/Disagree Statements

The following statements focus on the manager's role in balancing a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. The more managers in your organization understand how "average/typical" associates respond to the following eight statements, the more effective they will become in securing a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Please give your answer to the following eight agree/disagree statements. For maximum effectiveness, please answer these statements before reading the authors' comments.

1. Business organizations are created to benefit owners, employees, and customers. Of these three groups, the group that is most important to the continued success of a business organization is the customer.
   Agree_________ Disagree_________

2. It is management's responsibility to motivate associates.
   Agree_________ Disagree_________

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3. When associates do not behave properly, it is generally because the wrong person was hired for the job.
   Agree_________ Disagree_________

4. If organizations could afford to pay their associates more money, organizational productivity would be improved.
   Agree_________ Disagree_________

5. Managers and supervisors should never praise associates who are doing work that is not up to standard because this results in praise for below-standard performance.
   Agree_________ Disagree_________

6. It is good-management practice to mix praise with criticism because it makes the criticism more acceptable to associates.
   Agree_________ Disagree_________

7. For every minute that supervisors spend with associates in discussions that involve corrective action and criticism, they should spend as much time in discussions that involve praise and recognition.
   Agree_________ Disagree_________

8. Most mangers and supervisors give associates negative feedback for good performance.
   Agree_________ Disagree_________

Number of your agree statements? _______

Number of your disagree statements? _______

Authors' Comments

Your authors believe there is only one “agree” statement and seven "disagree" statements. The following is a discussion of the agree/disagree statements from your authors' perspective (based on current behavioral research).

Business organizations are created to benefit owners, employees, and customers. Of these three groups, the group that is most important to the continued success of a business organization is the customer. Disagree. While organizations exist to serve all three groups and business schools profess the importance of the customer, your authors agree with Sam Walton on this agree/disagree statement. The founder of Wal-Mart was once quoted as saying that the most important groups that Wal-Mart serves are its associates because if an organization takes care of its associates, the associates will in turn take care of the organization's customers. How employees interact with customers largely determines if these customers will return to do future business with the organization. Therefore, employees are the prime determinant of business success.

It is management's responsibility to motivate associates. Disagree. Management cannot motivate associates; motivation must come from within. However, effective managers do have it in their power to work hard at creating and maintaining a positive motivational work environment. It is the existence of this positive motivational work environment that will result in associates being motivated to work at their highest motivational levels.

When associates do not behave properly, it is generally because the wrong person was hired for the job. Disagree. While it is important to hire the “right” people, managers attempt to hire the best people they can find. Therefore, it seems inappropriate to blame poor performance on the hiring process. It seems likely that more inappropriate behavior/poor performance is caused by poor management than by poor hiring practices.

If organizations could afford to pay their associates more money, organizational productivity would be improved. Disagree. In fact, we argue that money is often a great de-motivator, especially when wages are perceived to be unfair (i.e., Johnny made more than me, so I'm tired of giving 110 percent effort) and inadequate. We challenge you to find a single person who believes they are being overpaid. This implies that associates expect to be paid what they believe they are worth. The manager must ask whether paying more money will increase motivation of associates over the long-term. If money is truly a motivator, then raises should lead to increased productivity. If not, money cannot be considered a true motivator.

Managers and supervisors should never praise associates who are doing work that is not up to standard because this results in praise for

below-standard performance. Disagree (even though conventional wisdom might say otherwise). When associates are showing improvement, the effective manager will offer praise. The praise must be sincere, and the improvement noticeable. In general, it is not wise to offer praise for work that is below standard because associates receive mixed signals regarding what is expected. However, if improvement is made even though performance is not yet up to standard, if it is ignored and not recognized it will quickly go away.

It is good management practice to mix praise with criticism because it makes the criticism more acceptable to associates. Disagree. On the surface this may seem like a humane and appropriate management strategy to pursue. However, many behavioral scientists agree that you are not doing the associate any favors by sugar-coating criticism. In the end, the associate will be more appreciative if you get to the point and offer constructive criticism. Managers should also consider what happens when well intentioned praise is mixed with criticism: the associate will remember the criticism and forget the praise! Therefore, our conclusion is simple: keep feedback pure. When earned, offer generous specific praise. When needed, provide the corrective action feedback that is required to improve performance. Do not mix the two.

For every minute that supervisors spend with associates in discussions that involve corrective action and criticism, they should spend as much time in discussions that involve praise and recognition. Disagree. Okay, this was kind of a trick question. While the authors agree that praise and recognition are important, we disagree on the amount of time that should be spent praising and recognizing associates. Effective managers will tell you they look for ways to get into discussions that involve praising and recognition four times as much as corrective action and criticism. This 4:1 positive to negative feedback ratio is not an absolute. Rather, it is the direction toward which effective managers need to move.

Most mangers and supervisors give associates negative feedback for good performance. Agree. Admittedly, most managers would not intentionally give negative feedback for good performance. However, many managers give negative feedback for good performance by ignoring good performance. Ignoring good performance may have the same effect on associates as giving negative feedback. Most assuredly, ignoring good performance makes it less likely that the desired activities will be repeated. Perhaps this approach to management is best characterized by “that's what I hired you to do” statements so often spoken by managers.

Conclusion

We hope that this article caused you to re-evaluate some of the common misconceptions surrounding a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. We invite readers to provide feedback (via email) on whether or not you agree with the authors' position on these agree/disagree statements.

Your comments and suggestions are always welcome and you may email us directly at wysocki@ufl.edu or respond via extension web page http://webct.nerdc.ufl.edu:8910/public/WysockiExtension/index.html.

Drs. Wysocki and Kepner are happy to lead a workshop on "A Fair Day's Work For A Fair Day's Pay.

References

Extension presentations led by Professor Karl Kepner.

Class discussions in AEB 4424 (Human Resource Management in Agribusiness) and AEB 5757 (Strategic Agribusiness Human Resource Management).