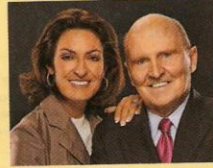


084 THE WELCHWAY | JACK & SUZY WELCH

Emotional Mismanagement

Negative feelings tend to spread. But information and inspiration can work wonders



What's a manager to do about feelings in business?

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Why, manage them, of course.

Not to mock your question in the slightest; we're dead serious. Because if there's one thing that doesn't get enough blame for undermining productivity, creativity, and the smooth functioning of business, it's the mismanagement of emotion in the workplace. Too many managers let people go, emotionally speaking, unmanaged.

Now, we're not qualified to opine on human nature—O.K., maybe we're as qualified as the next guy—but you don't have to watch reality TV to know that, left unattended, groups of people can fall into some pretty dysfunctional behaviors. Maybe it's because gossip, ganging up, paranoia, and the like were hardwired into the human brain to ensure the survival of the species, as some scientists hypothesize. But the reason groups can get so terribly caught up in negative feelings doesn't matter. What matters, from a manager's point of view, is that unhealthy emotions usually beget more unhealthy emotions.

That's why you have to manage them, which, fortunately, takes neither a degree in psychology nor more time than you already have. All it takes is an active commitment to remove uncertainty from your company and to instill a purpose-oriented approach to inspiration.

First, uncertainty. No manager knows, of course, everything about each individual's career trajectory or the company's future plans. But most man-

agers know a lot more than they say. Ever since we started traveling around the world in 2002, we have asked audiences for a show of hands in answer to this question: "Over the past year, how many of you have received an honest performance appraisal that really tells you where you stand?" Typically, even with audiences that have been eagerly participating until that moment, we get a 10% "yes" showing; more often than you'd believe, it's less.

That isn't just unacceptable, it's outrageous. You may be running a billion-dollar business, moving resources around the globe, and suavely narrating PowerPoint presentations to top management, but you simply do not have the right to call yourself a manager if you are not regularly telling your people what they are doing well and how they need to improve. In fact, you should be so clear in your evaluations that, should the time come to let someone go, that employee won't need to ask why. He'll want only to discuss "the deal" and the logistics of the transition.

We realize that the kind of candor we advocate doesn't come naturally to many managers. Some people would even say it's cruel. We'd say the opposite: that a lack of candor steals careers because it's usually too late for an employee to start over by the time he learns he has to, via pink slip.

As for removing company uncertainty, sharing as much data as possible is always the best practice. In particular, no

manager should ever commit the all-too-common sin of announcing some number of layoffs—usually to appease investors following weak results—without also announcing specifics about when, where, and who. Even when the news is bad, allow people to take their energy off worrying and place it on constructive action, be it restoring results or looking for another job.

On to inspiration—or put another way, the transformation of any sort of indifference about work into a true passion for the mission. Everyone knows that nothing great happens without passion. But too many managers adjust for that fact with oversized, overheated exhortations about the Next Big Thing. Enthusiasm never hurts, but real passion is sparked by purpose, by people knowing why the

organization is taking a certain path and what the journey will mean to them. Most people don't want to just punch a clock. They come to work to find meaning and dignity. You can help by showing your people how their work matters to the organization, the community, and even the world. And not just with an annual speech at the holiday party but with every chance you get—hallways, elevators, and parking lots included.

After all, people are all a manager has to work with. Don't let their feelings get away from you. | BW |

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Jack and Suzy look forward to your questions. You can e-mail them and view their new Web site at welchway.com. For their PODCAST, go to businessweek.com/search/podcasting.htm.



Fortunately, getting a grip on the emotional state of your people doesn't require a degree in psychology or truckloads of time