



Building Team Unity

Getting your employees on the same page

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Have you ever had a moment when someone in the office did something that really did not make any sense? His (or her) response may often be, “But that’s the way we’ve been doing it for years.”

Now, recall what impact that has had on you, your staff and, ultimately, the productivity of your area. Let us take a look at this a little more closely.

Example One: Your new sales reps cannot seem to get into the routine of entering all of their daily activities into your CRM system. When you investigate this, you find out they were under the impression that the system was only necessary for booking appointments, proposals and closed sales.

Example Two: You put the time and money into developing a direct mail campaign, but after a few weeks, you find out that no one has been mailing the postcards out on a regular basis. When you investigate, you discover that your marketing coordinator thought it would be best to see how many prospects responded before releasing the next flight.

In each of these examples, major flubs occurred that affected the health and viability of the organization. And in both cases — plus many more like them — decisions were made based on arbitrary data; that is to say, orders and commands were issued without a good, sound explanation. It also means decisions are being made without consideration of policy.

As consultants, we see this occur in businesses of every shape and size. The issue here is the introduction of “arbitraries.” L. Ron Hubbard, author of the Hubbard Management System, defined the term very precisely when he said that an “arbitrary” is a “false order or datum entered into a situation or group.” It may reveal itself as the rule of thumb staff members apply to any given situation in the absence of policy.

Sometimes these arbitrary decisions enter into the organization virtually undetected and without any known source or author who can provide the appropriate rationale.

So you ask a sales rep, “Who told you sales reps didn’t have to enter daily activities in ACT?”

“Um, well, I thought that’s always been the case.”

“I see. But who told you that?”

“Well, I think it was Joe when I first got here. Yeah, he told me there weren’t enough fields in ACT to enter that information, so he said we just skip over that.”

That is about as blatant as an arbitrary can get and, unfortunately, Joe cannot be corrected on his false data because he left the company back in 2006. Hopefully Joe went to a



competitor where he could spread even more false data and confusion. Regardless, the damage is done and now his irrational idea has been adopted as policy, which, unless eradicated, will bring the overall tone, morale and production of the team down over time.

In his experience with group dynamics, Hubbard discovered some very practical phenomena. A group, he determined, is as effective as the reasonableness of its ideas and the height of its ethics, plus its ability to confront and handle its environment. If your team members are confronted with irrational policies or behaviors and do not spot them, they will go off course. A common example of this occurs in many dealerships during the summer. You may start to hear sales reps defend their lack of appointments and sales by blaming it on the slow summer: “Everyone’s away on vacation in August; that’s why we’re not getting any deals signed.”

This is an arbitrary piece of data that can enter into a dealership, giving the team the justification necessary to make fewer calls and close fewer sales.

Notice Hubbard’s use of the word “ethics” in his definition of group effectiveness. This concept is often misunderstood, as it can be thought to mean not breaking policy or the law.

In fact, ethics is actually measured by one’s ability to think and act according to the greatest good for the greatest

number of dynamics. A group with good ethics writes and follows policies that promote the maximum amount of survival of its members and its overall purpose. The absence of policy and ethics can (and will) open the door to non-survival practices or routines, even among the best staff members, simply because the arbitrary decision or policy can appear to be legitimate. Scary, huh?

Now, there are occasions when certain arbitrary orders enter the scene for legitimate reasons. For example, an emergency situation may arise that does not allow a manager much time to explain his orders to the group. Recent floods, hurricanes, tornados and other major events in certain areas of the United States probably forced many managers to issue orders or directions to staff that did not come with specific explanations. In cases like this, the staff is used to following instantaneous orders, which are issued to protect and safeguard the group. When this happens, staff members instinctively follow the orders, provided they have faith and belief in the rationale and sanity of the manager who is issuing those orders. Even then, the manager should gather up his staff immediately after the crisis or emergency ends and explain his orders and reasons in order to avoid any chance of having these become standard operating procedures (SOPs) down the road.

But the vast majority of arbitrary rules are not born out

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of emergency situations. They are more likely the implanted ideas from an individual who either did not understand an agreed-upon policy or SOP, or simply had false data that had never been cleared up earlier by management.

Fortunately, there is a remedy for this. First, examine your team, probing for any orders and commands that were issued without explanation. If you find any, clear these up until there is absolutely no doubt

in your mind that everyone impacted understands the directions and why they were issued. Secondly, ask your staff members if there were any other earlier orders or commands given that they did not understand. Clear up any issues with these.

You will find that with persistence and repetition, your people will be able to spot arbitrarily set policies and will question them. When they do, you will have a more smoothly running and more profitable operation. ■

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