



As I read various articles in assorted magazines, I find some that are in total agreement with the Maset philosophy. Recognizing some would be of benefit to the readers of Maset News, I obtain permission and forward them to you.

In my years of both leading in assorted organizations and working as a consultant, I have tried to be a caring leader. In doing so, I believe it has helped the organizations that I have been involved with as well as supporting my associates to have better results using this particular style of management. It has also proven to be of assistance for me to become a better consultant to my customers.

I hope you find the following article to be of benefit to you.

Caring As a Leader

By: Denis Leonard

Be aware and care about your company and your employees.

A key aspect of quality management is the importance we place on employees, i.e., valuing people. We spend a significant amount of time and money officially sending this message to our team, espousing this pillar of quality. Yet, while doing this, we often directly contradict this by sending a clearer and longer lasting message. Let me give you a few examples.

Just two weeks after being downsized, a manager got a call from a vice president at his former company. "Great," he thought, "A job lead, someone reaching out to help, provide a reference?" No, I'm afraid not. The vice president was calling to remind him that he owed \$10 on the fantasy football league. You can bet that this frustrated manager told this story to as many people as he could, including colleagues who were still working at his former employer. This sort of story spreads like wildfire and rightly so. It's an amazingly uncaring, thoughtless thing to have done. It also provides as definitive insight into the attitudes of the organization's leadership.

I've seen companies let people go, despite the fact that they were national leaders in their profession and a huge asset to their organizations. The problem was they were thinking too much. Senior leaders were becoming annoyed at their level of professionalism or, more specifically, that they weren't doing the narrow piece of work they wanted them to do. Just do A, B and C; don't challenge, push, raise questions, or otherwise think outside the box. This message will be heard—loud and clear—whether you want it to or not. You've heard the phrase, "I'll just punch in and punch out." This is exactly the culture you will create; despite the how much money you spend on training you.

I had a discussion with a CEO about such issues as quality, employee satisfaction, and corporate strategy. A key phrase he used during the discussion was, "employees are our most valuable asset." As I left the building, I noticed a group of people milling around outside the entrance. Later that evening, the company, the building, and a now significantly larger group of people were on the local news. The company had just downsized. Yes, many of those "valuable assets" had been let go. Now, did the CEO believe what he had said but just couldn't keep these people? If that was the case, were they truly the most valuable assets? If they really were, wouldn't they be the last assets to go? Even if this was the first and only round of downsizing to occur, the CEO's declaration, "our employees are our most valuable asset" will ring hollow for the remaining employees.

Shortly after an organization had gone through its second round of downsizing, an executive was furious that one of his staff members was resigning, moving on to another organization that he felt would provide a more secure future. Obviously he was, as the executive put it, "not a team player, has no loyalty." There seemed to be no conscious connection between any potential lack of loyalty on the part of the organization in its downsizing and any realization that such downsizing would result in people feeling uneasy about their jobs and, so, put their resumes on the market.

Caring involves empathy and self awareness toward someone else; it cannot be enforced or dictated by corporate policy. You either care or you don't. If the majority of management lack caring, then this becomes the corporate culture. During our current economic situation downsizing is a fact of life, but it doesn't mean that we shouldn't care. While caring is an important management attribute at all times, it is during such times as these that caring is all the more important.

At the end of a manager training session, the trainer used a quiz with prizes to create some fun and as a wrap up of the training. When one of the top prizes was up for grabs, the trainer asked a question and seven hands went up at once. The company's CEO was one of them and he was selected, and he answers the question correctly. Great! He was listening, what a great lesson and role model to the team. But he then proceeds to take his prize and keep it. If you are a millionaire CEO, there might have been a better option at this point. He could have said, "Ask another question" or given the prize to someone else who he thought was a strong participant during the training. Instead one good lesson was made yet lost within five seconds; if there had been any caring at all, then this selfish action by the CEO wouldn't have happened. It was such a small event, but it was talked about for months and people viewed that action as showing the CEO's true colors.

The big event had arrived; most of the company was there. Everyone was in their company logo shirts except the owners. They were in sharp matching shirts (without logos) and slacks. Certainly it helped them stand out. Coincidence? The signal was loud and clear: "It is not about you, it's about us. You are not one of us, you're just a worker we are the owners, the important people." While the aim of the logo shirts is certainly to help promote the company it also does create a sense of pride and team spirit. However, when you suddenly are given the impression that you're wearing a "workers" shirt, below that of the owners, then any sense of team spirit is lost.

Treat people with respect. Look after young people just starting at your company, some day they may be your boss, peer, or subordinate. You want them to be prepared to do a professional job and treat you as you wish to be treated, with respect. Leading by example, treating people with respect – this is how culture and leadership can be instilled. How others act is based on how you act toward them.

Policy, the latest management trends, and doing what you should be doing are all fine. But more important is doing the right things to help create a positive employee environment. But if you are careless, all your work can be undone in a few minutes. Showing appreciation is not a sign of weakness, neither is caring.

How many people have you helped to develop, mentored, provided references for?
Be aware and care.

"This article appeared in "Quality Digest Daily," an electronic publication from *Quality Digest* magazine (www.qualitydigest.com)."

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