

Do it with S.T.Y.L.E.

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I will talk with you today about your involvement with the people with whom you work. I am certain that I will make some statements without citing proper references to research and I might even make certain assumptions that you will think are unrealistic! I hope that you leave this session with some new insights into how you relate to your colleagues. Not all of you are in a position to direct the activities of a large staff and many of you do not directly manage people in the traditional sense. You are, however, all working directly with many people, interacting in order to achieve certain school objectives and media center program objectives. You manage the role of learning center director and achieve the degree of importance that the media learning center assumes or is granted in your school. As I see it, there is no one right way for your school or media center organization to be managed. Rather it depends on historical circumstances, the dual missions of the center and the school and, most importantly, the fit between management's assumptions about people and about the external environment. Whether we are consciously aware of it or not, we all make assumptions about what people are like, what motivates them, and how to deal with them.

The manager's assumptions not only will affect the form of organization to be utilized in fulfilling a task but also will determine his or her management strategy. The kinds of expectations that you have about people will be primarily an expression of your assumptions about them. Every manager makes assumptions about people. Whether we are aware of these assumptions or not, they operate as a theory in terms of how we decide to deal with superiors, peers, and subordinates. Our effectiveness as managers will depend on the degree to which these assumptions fit reality. Historically, the assumptions about people in organizations have largely reflected philosophical positions about the nature of man and have served as a justification for the particular type of organizational and political systems in vogue at the time.¹

I think that the kinds of assumptions you make as a manager about the nature of people will determine your managerial strategy and your concept of the psychological contact between the organization and the school and the people with whom you have contact. So if you want to go back and refer to your basic psychology, you will remember that man's motives fall into classes which have always been arranged in a hierarchy. Simple needs for survival, (that's safety and security); social needs; ego satisfaction; the need for autonomy and independence; and, self-actualization (the desire for self-fulfillment, coined by Kurt Goldstein). As the lower level needs are satisfied, they release some of the higher level motives. I believe all people with whom you have contact in a work situation needs self-actualization; that is, a sense of meaning and accomplishment in his or her work.²

If you will consider the following assumptions as a base from which you could relate to people your style of management might be clarified. Man seeks to self-actualize on the job and is capable of doing so. This implies the exercise of a certain amount of autonomy and independence. People are also primarily self-motivated and self-controlled. Too many externally imposed incentives and controls are likely to threaten a person. There may be no inherent conflict between the need for self-actualization and for more effective organizational performance. If given the opportunity man will voluntarily integrate his own goals with that of the organization. How will these assumptions affect your managerial style? For one thing, you may worry less about being overly considerate to employees and more about how to make their work challenging or meaningful. The issue should not be whether an employee can fulfill his social needs; the issue is whether he can find meaning in his work which gives him a sense of pride, a sense of self-esteem. An awareness of man's needs, as I have just outlined, should help you in relating to your peers and to your supervisors.³

Therefore, as a manager, you may find yourself with the task of trying to determine what would challenge a particular worker. You definitely will be a catalyst rather than a controller in the traditional sense. You will be a delegator in the sense of giving your people just as much responsibility as they believe they can handle. If man is self-motivated, there are three basic needs which are particularly relevant: the need for achievement; the need for power; and the need for affiliation. Every person has a certain amount of these needs and the intensity of any given need will vary with

the situation the person is in. Usually a person is likely to have some bias toward either achievement or power, or affiliation.⁴

Studies of different occupations have revealed that teachers tend to rate higher than average in their desire for power. Managers in industry are most concerned, as you may expect, with successful task accomplishment. Therefore, one of the most important implications which you might identify is that the successful manager must be a good diagnostician and must value a spirit of inquiry. If the abilities and the motives of people under you and around you are so variable, then you must also have the sensitivity and the diagnostic ability to be able to sense and appreciate the differences. Rather than regard the existence of differences as a painful truth to be wished away, you must learn to value differences and to value the diagnostic process which reveals differences. In summary, we need the personal flexibility and the range of skills necessary to vary our own behavior. If the needs and the motives of our subordinates are so different, surely they must be treated differently.⁵

Many managers appear to be reluctant to focus their attention on the behavior of subordinates and the causes of the behavior. Too often managers appear to concentrate solely on the effects of the behavior. Now, why do some managers tend to avoid responsibility for the behavior of subordinates? Accepting the responsibility of judging another individual is uncomfortable to some managers. The position of authority over others makes many managers extremely uncomfortable. Another thing is that one of the most powerful factors influencing an individual's behavior in the work setting is the behavior of his or her superiors. Changing the behavior of a subordinate, therefore, is often dependent upon changing one's own managerial behavior.⁶

There are enormous complexities involved in the behavior of people. All human behavior, as you know, is a fascinating blend of rational and irrational, conscious and unconscious. On the one hand, people are logical machines that perceive reality and make measured evaluations, sensible judgments. At the same time, we attempt to satisfy psychological needs and minimize anxiety through methods of which we are largely unaware. There is a constant pressure to avoid situations in which we feel anxious, threatened, or appear to be incompetent, foolish, or weak. We all try to manipulate the situations we are in to avoid uncomfortable postures. We steer toward situations in which we feel restricted, accepted, productive, and extremely safe. The unconscious behavioral strategems that we employ to always remain comfortable have been labeled "defense mechanisms."⁷

Logical, sensible goal-oriented behavior and unconscious defenses do not operate as two independent behavioral mechanisms. As we mature, defensive reactions become a part of us and are built into everything we do. Unfortunately, our tendency is to see our behavior as logical and rational and therefore we have difficulty in distinguishing that part which is shaped by our need to minimize anxiety. We seem to be much more aware of the defensive behavior of other people. Though we may not diagnose it as such or we may not take time to understand what causes such behavior, we are all aware of the person who passes the buck, escapes responsibility, constantly underachieves, or the person with the ability who somehow always seems to be unable to explain the reasons for a particular decision. Many managers place a definite boundary around their own capacity for initiative and imagination and within that boundary they see themselves as doing all they possibly can. The tendency to blame others for inefficiency is often rather overwhelming. Initiating needed improvements, making changes, may not always be somebody else's job.

Another popular defense mechanism is what is called, "perceptive distortion." We have a general tendency to try to differentiate between the good guys (with whom, of course, we identify) and the bad guys. The world appears cleared when it is divided into heroes and heroines, our team and your team. Our team, the idealized heroes, all lined up against the villains and in the shootout, our team always should win. It takes many forms: teachers versus principal, principal versus superintendent, and so on.⁸

If we employ such defense mechanisms constantly it creates hidden anxiety. People try to minimize anxiety first by perceiving and interpreting the events around them and then by acting in response to those perceptions. Our reaction usually reflect ways that are ego protective and reassuring. All of us share the need to see things in terms that are most fitting to our particular psychological needs. Thus, while we all share the same reality, we each tend to see that reality in our own terms.⁹

The insidious nature of all of these defensive and unconscious barriers to effective management is perhaps best illustrated in cases by which some of us seek to upgrade the effectiveness of media center organization or to overcome its problems, or adopt programs which are in them-

selves forms of escape. When confronted with the consequences of inadequate performance, we often prefer to see the fault clearly directed away from ourselves. We are all too ready to believe that problems arise from faulty school organization, the wrong management style on the part of superiors, lack of motivation on the part of other teachers, poor human relations within the school, or lack of communication within the entire unit.¹⁰

In order to increase our effectiveness, we need to develop skills in addition to being a good diagnostician and to have a spirit of inquiry. We need to develop the ability to identify our defenses and to minimize their impact on our performance as managers.

Some writers think that successful managers or people who inter-relate constantly with other people share certain characteristics of self motivation, emotional security, common sense, good judgment, inquiring minds, average to superior intelligence, and integrity. The first five traits can perhaps be learned and developed while the last two are less easily developed but certainly can be nourished. A strong self concept is vitally important for you to enjoy success as a media manager. Self-respect is critical to successful involvement with people. Decision making requires risk-taking and self-confidence is a great buffer for that.

How well do you know yourself? Since we all know we normally think of ourselves differently from the way other people do, it may be beneficial for us to investigate and identify our MO at school, to identify how we are perceived by others. It is possible that some modification of behavior might be in order. If you are fuzzy about your managerial style or type, make an effort to define it. Resist getting this type of information from your best friend. Gaining insight into your particular mode of thinking will help direct you in your interaction with people, giving you a background of realistic self awareness of your tendency toward a particular style of management.

References

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8. Ibid., p. 74, 77.
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