

## **Reinvent Your Staff Meetings**

*By Paul Falcone*

Take all the employee relations problems you've experienced as a line manager over the years, and chances are that you can attribute them to one of two problems: lack of communication or lack of recognition.

Believe it or not, both can be handled through that much-maligned regular staff meeting. If they are done right, staff meetings can become the perfect vehicle for constant communication with and among your staff members and can give you the opportunity to recognize their efforts in front of others. And a structured weekly staff meeting is a good place to open the lines of communication while increasing the amount of recognition for a job well done.

### **Step 1:**

Invite all subordinates to discuss what's going on in their worlds. Specifically ask, "What have you accomplished in the past week and what have been your challenges?" For example, a staff of recruiters may share how many positions they have filled that week, which deals are being delayed because of a line manager's indecisiveness or counteroffer deal breakers that may leave a position unfilled.

This discussion provides two benefits. All staff members hear what their peers are doing, which tends to develop a greater appreciation for the contributions of others. Second, that information sharing also keeps you in the know. The key is to allow your associates to share their information first, so the meetings are not "top-down" messages from you to them.

### **Step 2:**

Introduce constructive criticism into the decision-making process. Specifically ask, "What do we need to do differently to reinvent the workflow in our area?" This simple invitation to make suggestions satisfies the basic need to be heard and to make a positive difference. But what do you do if employees complain about things beyond your control? To ensure that the meeting doesn't turn into a gripe session, help your employees focus on what can be done with existing resources. Encourage people to look at your existing way of doing business and to redefine the critical points where inefficiencies, delays or outright breakdowns occur. Define a bite-sized plan of action that can be easily implemented and measured that week, and ask for a volunteer to spearhead the new activity. That's empowerment—the freedom to suggest a better way of doing things and the authority to put your personal imprint on the revisions.

### **Step 3:**

Focus on what you, as a group, could have done differently in the past week to make the company a better place. Employees are hired to increase revenues, decrease expenses and save time. Any lost opportunities to affect the company's bottom line in one of those three ways should be discussed, studied and revisited in the future. "What could we have done differently?" is a natural counterpoint to the opening question because it mirrors

what's going on in your group at any given time. It also allows for shared case studies so that similar situations can be handled more effectively on a go-forward basis.

Periodically turn the focus on your own particular effectiveness as the supervisor. Ask, "What can I do differently to give you all more structure, direction and feedback, and help act as a career mentor and coach?" That's the classic olive branch, and yes, it may make you feel vulnerable at first; however, you won't know what your subordinates need unless you ask.

What if a lack of trust already exists in your working relationship with your staff? If you believe that they perceive you as distant, out of touch or otherwise ineffective, don't introduce this touchy question to the group as a whole. Individual meetings with group members would make more sense to gain their buy-in. Once those one-on-one meetings are completed, though, it should be safe to introduce this concept of mentoring and coaching on a more consistent basis.

When you strengthen communication, recognition and trust, you strengthen the overall culture of the work unit. You also make everyone's lives a little easier by reducing the assumptions that people make in a vacuum when there is an information void that needs to be filled. And when you give your people more "face time" with you, and with each other, a spirit of camaraderie will develop.

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