

Sharpen Your Tools

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The Generational Shift

HOW RESTAURANT MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS MUST ADAPT IN 2018

Over the years, our “Generational Shift” study has repeatedly taken us back to the under-management epidemic. That’s because under-management is almost always there, hiding in plain sight. Our ongoing research shows that under-management is a perennial issue: The remarkably consistent data shows that nine out of 10 managers fail to maintain an ongoing one-on-one dialogue sufficient to deliver on the “the fundamentals.”

It’s always been hard to manage people. It is much harder today than ever before, and it’s getting harder every day. Why? The causes of the under-management epidemic dovetail very much with the trend lines of the Great Generational Shift.

UNDER PRESSURE

Let’s start with globalization and technology. The pace of change is accelerating for everyone all the time—from the macro level all the way down to the micro. In today’s knowledge-driven, machine-powered, highly interconnected, fiercely competitive global marketplace, everything is complex, fast moving and always in flux. Work that used to take weeks now takes moments. Relationships that would have been nearly impossible due to geography are now taken for granted. Communication and travel are nearly instantaneous.

Everybody is under more pressure. The corporate order of the day is to run ever more lean and flexible; squeeze more and more productivity and quality out of tightly controlled resources; chase innovation and technology to keep from falling behind; and manage talent as a capital (depreciating) asset, in the wake of a profound transformation in the fundamental employer-employee relationship. After decades of constant downsizing, restructuring and re-engineering, employees no longer expect to pay their dues and climb the corporate ladder.

THE NEW CAREER LANDSCAPE

Job security has been dead for some time now. The default presumption of long-term hierarchical employment relationships has been replaced by a new presumptive career path built on a growing portfolio of short-term transactional employment relationships of varying scope and duration. Very few employees now look at one employer as a primary source of their long-term career security, much less their long-term economic security.

The promise (implied or even explicit) of long-term vesting rewards from employers is no longer enough to get employees to perform. Employees are less willing to follow orders, work harder and contribute their best today in exchange for vague promises about what they might get in five or 10 years. Who knows where they’ll be in five or 10 years? There is simply too much uncertainty.

Employees want to know, “What do you want from me today, tomorrow, this week, this month, this year? And what do you have to offer me in return today, tomorrow, this week, this month, this year?”

Managing people has become an ongoing (sometimes daily) negotiation. That is high maintenance!

At the same time, most managers, like most everybody else, are being asked to do more with less. They have more of their own non-management tasks and responsibilities, increased administrative burdens and growing managerial spans of control, often including employees working in different locations or on different schedules. Meanwhile, they depend more and more on people in other workgroups and departments. With so much resource and process streamlining, there is growing inter-dependency in almost everybody’s work. Everything we do now involves a lot of moving parts—and so many other people—all the time.

Meanwhile, everybody involved is human. People have feelings. That’s a significant complication for everybody involved.

BACK TO BASICS

What is the solution? An abiding commitment to the fundamentals: relentless high-quality communication.

That means consistently engaging every direct report in an ongoing, highly structured, content-rich, one-on-one dialogue about the work that needs to be done by that person. Things go much better when managers consistently make expectations clear and provide candid feedback for every individual every step of the way. Use team meetings only for what team meetings are good for—and make the most of them. When managers maintain high-quality one-on-one dialogues with their direct reports, they almost always improve employee performance and morale, increase retention of high performers and turnover among low performers, and achieve significant measurable gains in business outcomes.

MANAGING MILLENNIALS

What about managers who lead teams comprised mainly of millennials, or the younger workers on the end of the generational spectrum? In order to retain these employees for any length of time, it is especially important to find ways to engage them in the basics of their particular position or role. For young workers in “lower-tier” positions, usually some type of frontline service position, it can be easy for them to become discouraged by the lack of apparently exciting development opportunities provided by their day-to-day responsibilities. Making the commitment as a manager to help employees develop strong soft skills, which are transferrable to any position in any location, is one of the best things you can do for younger employees.

Customer service, in particular, is a soft skill that will never become obsolete. Teach younger millennials and inexperienced workers that every single customer-service interaction is an opportunity to practice and fine tune this valuable skill. Remind them that every customer has his or her own sphere of influence and authority. Every customer is worth impressing. Impressive people are impressed by those who are themselves positive, motivated, polite, focused on the task at hand and willing to go the extra mile.

HANDLING UNEXPECTED PROBLEMS

Problem solving is another soft skill that is often an issue for restaurant and foodservice managers. Again, this is typically seen in younger workers, usually servers, hosts or other front-end staff who deal a lot with customers as part of their work. If a customer comes to an employee with an unexpected or unusual request, it is up to that employee to both make the customer happy and work within his or her scope of authority.

How many problems come up that truly haven't already been solved before? As a manager, the question you need to ask yourself is this: What kind of job aids do you have at your disposal to help your employees use ready-made solutions for dealing with recurring problems, so they don't have to "problem-solve" anew each time?

Learning and practicing ready-made solutions provides experience in solving problems successfully. Employees get in the habit of solving problems well and learn what effective solutions look like, which is a much better foundation for improvising should unanticipated problems arise. You will have many more problems that are solved quickly and easily. You will have fewer situations that are mishandled and fewer ongoing problems that hide below the radar, fester and grow, unbeknownst to anyone.

Bruce Tulgan is an adviser to business leaders all over the world and a sought-after keynote speaker and seminar leader. He is the founder and CEO of RainmakerThinking Inc., a management research and training firm, as well as RainmakerThinking.Training, an online training company. Tulgan is the best-selling author of numerous books, including "Not Everyone Gets a Trophy" and "Bridging the Soft Skills Gap."