Workers thrive in an environment of mutual respect

by Michael_Kinsman

When I hear my friends complain about their work lives, the continuing theme I hear often is that they don't respect who they work for.

Not many can articulate it that way. They just tell me they don't like their bosses.

I've thought about that and come to the realization that workers often don't respect their bosses because their bosses don't respect them.

Bruce Katcher, an organizational psychologist and president of the Discovery Systems consulting firm in Sharon, Mass., says that he finds that 30 percent of workers feel they are not respected on the job.

"Unfortunately, we live in an 'Apprentice'-like' society where respect takes a back seat to achieving 'numbers,' grabbing power and back-stabbing," says Katcher.

Yet, respect is the backbone of any personal relationship. Managers and workers need to understand that respect is circular and that without it, a company will be hampered trying to reach its goals.

Katcher says he can spot an unhealthy company just from walking in the door and observing the demeanor of people who work there.

He knows there is a problem if meetings are filled with squabbling, if supervisors interrupt private meetings with employees to take phone calls, or if supervisors micromanage workers because they don't trust them.

He also sees an unhealthy environment if workers and management talk negatively about each other, if employees in different departments treat each other as adversaries, and if employees simply fail to demonstrate common courtesy to each other.

Katcher offers four tips for building respect inside a company and helping it climb from the ranks of healthy into a position where workers and managers are more aligned in their pursuits of company goals.

He suggests:

- Senior managers need to be sensitized about the importance of respecting each other, their direct reports, and all employees. They should serve as role models by consistently demonstrating respect for others.

- Make respect for employees an important part of the company mission. Communicate the mission widely and consistently to all employees.

- Instruct supervisors to provide employees with positive recognition for showing respect. When they catch employees in the act of demonstrating respect, they should tell them that this type of behavior is valued by the organization.

- Build respect into your company's performance appraisal system. This is an important way of showing the value the company has for mutual respect. If managers and supervisors are rated on how well they show respect for their employees, they will embrace that.

Your company doesn't have to stagger under bad morale and an unhealthy work environment. Attitudes can be changed, both for the good of the employees and their supervisors as well as the general welfare of the entire company.

"Fight the trend," Katcher says. "Do your small part in making your organization a better place to work. Preach and practice the lost art of personal respect."

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