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Middle Management - Are They Keeping Up?

A recent report has come out in UK that says under-performing middle managers are cutting productivity of British business to the tune of £220 billion per year. The research conducted by Hay consultancy showed that 38% of UK Directors believe that their organisation is "paralysed" by ineffective middle management and that they are the single greatest barrier to the company achieving their objectives.

I would tend to agree that this is an issue and applies to organisations that have Directors and senior managers that are looking at the bigger picture or even globally. Whilst there are a lot of Directors I meet that are not looking outside their immediate issues, many more are looking strategically and realising the way the world is changing and will continue to change.

These are the Directors, senior managers and company owners that are aware of how business can change overnight and if they have not got a close eye on the future trends and issues that are appearing on their horizon, then they will quickly get themselves in a position where they have lost their market or have lost the opportunity available to them.

However, this awareness is not being translated to middle managers and people at various levels in the organisation who are stuck in the here and now. These people are seeing their senior managers as having their heads in the clouds, probably viewed as constantly changing their minds and definitely out of touch with what is happening.

"Well" you may say, "isn't that always been the cry from people about their managers?"

Yes, but for a different reason. In the past the managers have been seen as detached from the reality of what it is like at the lower levels of the business because they, in most cases, were detached. As they had risen the ranks (and many didn't even do that) they had let the power go to their head or simply forgotten what it was like as they got embroiled in their position.

The reason now is not the same. Senior managers are more aware of what is happening at the grass roots and appreciate the issues a lot more than they did twenty years ago. However, they are also having to be a lot more aware of what is going on **OUTSIDE** their organisation and in the world now. It is the communication of this information to their people that is creating the impression that they have lost touch with their people.

So we have a situation where senior people (still not all of them) are more aware of trends and global issues but their middle managers are still locked into try to conform to processes and systems that were put into place a while ago. These may be important but they see any new ideas and systems as getting in the way of what they see is their job.

The same report says that if middle managers were given better training their teams could enhance productivity by 29%. Training, learning and development is easily accessible for any manager willing to develop themselves and improve their performance. I believe that it is a combination of the right training, learning and development as well as keeping them in the loop with current thinking and trends.

A middle manager that understands that the Directors are seeing the world from a different angle compared to what they see day-by-day, and are allowed to be part of that overview, will be more tolerant and supportive of their Directors instead of getting in the way and limiting progress.

So the questions for this month are aimed at two levels.

If you are at a senior level or a business owner:

- Are you communicating with your middle managers in a way that takes them with you and your thinking?
- Are you involving them in the challenges you see ahead?
- Are you providing the training, development, support and communication that lets them understand what you have to keep your eye on and what you want them to do as a result?
- Are they capable to hold their position in the way your business has to operate today?

If you are a manager, at some level in the organisation:

- How do you see your Directors or Senior Managers?
- Are you aware of what they are having to do in terms of strategy, planning and trying to make sense of the way the world is moving on?
- Do you take the time to try and understand where they are coming from?
- Are you so focused on maintaining the status-quo that you have lost the ability to see the need to change?

Have a great month and I look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Biddle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line underneath it.

Paul