



THE Learning Advantage

Mobley's Musings: Failing to Pre-Plan Means Pre-Planning to Fail

What has happened to pre-planning – thinking things through ahead of time? How many times have you gone to a meeting and been asked if you had brought such and such document? It would have been a cinch to bring if you'd only known in advance, but never mind. The team will just muddle through without it, be less productive and waste everyone's time.

Especially irritating are organizations that have standard visitor requirements—like government agencies that require two forms of ID and/or a utility bill with your name and address—but don't bother to inform you of this rule until you get there. Who carries their water bill around with them anyway? Another frequent offender is a doctor's office that needs your medical records from another doctor, but they don't tell you they haven't received them until you show up for your appointment.

There's a saying in the military: "Prior planning prevents poor performance." When it comes to business meetings, good management practices include providing an agenda at least two days in advance that notes the goals for the meeting, what pre-work is needed, and what materials should be on hand. If visitors will be attending, they should receive security requirements for entering the building.

Taking time to develop, document, and implement procedures for repeatable processes will ensure staff and clients know what is expected and will save time and irritation for all.

Sandy



Sandy Mobley

Ask Sandy

Not management material?

My clients in leadership positions are often confounded by staff who are not interested in becoming managers or managers reluctant to move to the next level. My clients couldn't wait to be a boss and they don't understand people who aren't eager to keep moving up. When they ask staff why they don't want to advance and become a manager they get a variety of answers:

- "I'd rather do the work than manage others."
- "I don't want to deal with people and all their issues."
- "I don't trust others to do the job as well as I can but as a manager, I'm dependent on them."
- "I don't want more responsibility."

Typically the carrot that leadership dangles to entice people to become managers is the higher salary that goes with the greater responsibility. But if they take the job only for the money, their hearts probably aren't in it and they can do more harm than good. Instead of a great worker, you have a poor manager who continues to do the work, claiming the best projects and micromanaging the staff.

Instead, I find helping people learn the job of managing as part of the promotion produces better results. Most people don't get training in how to manage so it can seem harder than it actually is. With a good management fundamentals curriculum and an effective leader to mentor the person, becoming a manager can be a positive experience, especially if the person likes to develop others. Seeing others learn and excel in the things the new manager was good at can be even more satisfying than doing the work.

Another incentive to become a manager is that, along with more responsibility, managers typically have more discretion in deciding how best to get the work done. Staff who have been itching to improve current processes are more likely to affect those changes as a manager. And as managers work their way up, their ability to influence the direction of the organization increases. For many, the trappings of power—the corner office, executive assistants and expense accounts—aren't as important as having an impact and being recognized for it. Showing staff members that advancement means more impact and visibility may be the motivation they need.

Even with these inducements, some people will still prefer to stay where they are, doing what they're doing. But they need to understand the cost of not taking on more responsibility, especially in organizations with an "up or out" culture. When I was at Hewlett Packard, leadership decreed that the half-life of an engineer was four years. Engineers who didn't advance into management and assume a more strategic role within four years were let go in favor of new hires with more current skills. Unless the organization has a "grow or go" culture, which allows staff to stay on provided they build deeper knowledge and expertise, hiring new staff may be a better choice.

When you are looking to promote a new crop of managers, make sure you understand what motivates your staff so you can help them make good career choices and share with them what you've learned along the way to becoming an effective manager.

Learning for Leaders : Talk to your employees about why they're reluctant to take on greater responsibility. When you understand their reasons, you are in a better position to create the conditions for success.

Coaches Corner: Help your clients identify ways to motivate their staff to accept greater responsibility.

If you have questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



Are You Tough Enough to Lead?

My summer reading has included *Steve Jobs* by Walter Isaacson and Brad Stone's *The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon*. I was surprised by how often the ideas of these two visionary businessmen were criticized by investors, their leadership team, and even students at Harvard Business School who reviewed the Amazon case study and told Bezos in no uncertain terms that he should exit the business. Yet neither Jobs nor Bezos was deterred by criticism. If anything, it seemed to make them more certain of their path, more determined to tough it out.

Is Tough Leadership Fair?

Tough leadership, like tough love, imposes high standards and even higher expectations on employees. Needing to be liked won't work for a leader who, in Jobs' words, wants to "put a ding in the universe." Bezos required employees to work seven days a week in the early days. When employees complained about not having work-life balance, he didn't mince words. "If you want work-life balance," he told them, "don't come to Amazon. If you want to build something amazing, this is the place for you."

Leaders like Jobs and Bezos expect a lot of their employees, but no more than they expect of themselves. They work long hours, are consumed with thoughts about the company, put off social events and children's sports and aren't usually well-rounded. They have no time for anything but work and maybe exercise, but only because exercising gives them more energy to work long hours.

Organizations that set high performance bars will attract driven, can-do people who are eager to learn and achieve success. But when these top performers are rewarded more than their merely above-average coworkers, the grumbling begins. "It's not fair," some might say. "I've got a family and can't work the hours that Joe the Superstar puts in." Joe made a tough bet, forgoing work-life balance in the hope of a big payout. That he won his bet may not seem fair to others not willing to gamble. But who says everything has to be fair?

Tough leaders do not shy away from letting underperformers go, realizing it is necessary to ensure the organization thrives. As a leader, I rarely saw bad employees; more often I saw a bad job fit. And I found that people who aren't doing their best work are well aware of it. They know they ought to find a new job, but they're reluctant to risk leaving because they might not be successful at a new job. As a coach, I have helped dozens of people in this situation transition to more fulfilling work. I tell them the pain of being fired fades once they find work that better suits their skills and interests. For many people, the quick pain of being let go is preferable to slow death at their desks doing work they don't love.

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