

Proposition 36

Growing Managers, not Bosses

In a Word In the twenty-first century, managers are responsible for the application and performance of knowledge at task, team, and individual levels. Their accountability is absolute and cannot be relinquished. In a changing world, successful organizations spend more time, integrity, and brainpower on selecting them than on anything else.



Imagine

Your organization has the right strategy. It also has the right structure (since that follows strategy). Are you happy? Not yet. You do not have enough of the right stuff.

The Right Stuff

The right stuff is inspiring, caring, infusing, and initiating managers who go about their business quietly, on the word of Henry Mintzberg. Warren Bennis, always keen on leaders, sees them as white knights who can somehow herd cats. Most people would be happy with either variety. Indeed, they would be happy with any

of the prototypical characters drawn in management textbooks. But the fact is that such high-caliber material is not available for nearly all organizations.

So it is important to make the most of what organizations do have. And to spend, therefore, more time, integrity, and brainpower on making people decisions than on anything else. There are good reasons for this: experience shows that one in three promotions end in failure, that one in three is just about effective, and that one in three comes to pass right. The quality of promotion and staffing decisions reveals the values and standards of management and whether it takes its duties seriously.

Managerial Responsibility

Ninety percent of what we call “management” consists of making it difficult for people to get things done.

—Peter Drucker

To whom do these decisions relate? Let us look at what is required. In the twenty-first century, managers are responsible for the application and performance of knowledge at task, team, and individual levels. This accountability is absolute and cannot be relinquished. Once upon a time, the standard tasks of managers were to set objectives, organize, motivate and communicate, measure accomplishments, and develop people. Excepting the smallest organizations, they must now also know how to integrate worldwide phenomena into strategic decisions, take greater risks more often over longer periods, visualize their organization as a whole and blend their function within it, manage by objective, inspire and motivate knowledge workers, build cohesive teams, and communicate information rapidly and succinctly. Some necessary generic attributes are enthusiasm, integrity, toughness, fairness, humanity, humility, and confidence. Without a doubt, management and its requirements are more complex and there is no room for safe mediocrity.

Manager Development

It follows, then, that managers must be groomed and developed for strategic, operational, and team leadership. (The long-standing, false dichotomy between managers and leaders is on its last legs: management is a role, leadership an attribute.) As luck would have it, however, the art of manager development is in its infancy. Mistaken beliefs abound: manager development is not about attending courses; it is not about finding potential; it is not about promotion or replacement planning; and it is definitely not a means to change personality. Its sole purpose is to make a person effective. For this reason, manager development must deal with the structure of management relations, with tasks, with the management skills that a

person needs, and with the changes in behavior that are likely to sharpen existing skills and make them more operative. In sum, if managers are to be grown, the elements of identity that should be cultivated relate to quality (what a manager has to be), function (what a manager has to do), and situation (what a manager has to know).

Growing Managers

It follows further that human resource management needs to change. Too often, what passes for management of human resources has little to do with human resources and even less with management. Detractors say that most human resource divisions would be hard pressed to prove that they are making a real difference. As a minimum, it should be recognized that the majority of people want to work productively and that managing them is the responsibility of their manager, not that of a human resource specialist. But there are vital roles that are best carried out by human resource divisions. One of them is growing managers, not bosses. There are implications for training, selection, coaching and mentoring, giving people who merit it the chance to manage, education for management and leadership, and strategies for manager development.

Afterword

These days, people do not so readily accept as manager someone whose credentials they do not admire. If persons are promoted because they are politicians, others will deride management for forcing them to become politicians too. They will stop performing or they will quit. This should matter very much. When rewards and perquisites go to mere cleverness, obsequiousness, or nonperformance, an organization declines in tune with these attributes.

Further Reading

Adair J (2005) The John Adair handbook of management and leadership. Viva Books Private Limited

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