



Hughes-Consulting

"News You Can Use"

March 2008

Partnering with You to Achieve Results



Hughes-Consulting
specializes in
Human Resources
and **Quality**
Management
Consulting.

Hughes-Consulting is
an approved **third-**
party consultant to
LANO and MEPoL.

For past copies of
"News You Can Use"
please see our
website
www.hughes-consulting.org

Contact Us

hughesconsulting
@bellsouth.net or call
Office: 985-893-2236

7 STEPS FOR BUILDING STRONG MANAGER/EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Front-line managers have a critical impact on employee relations in any organization. Too frequently, though, managers don't have the experience, skills or information they need to succeed in this area. HR can play a proactive role here, helping to minimize employee relations issues within the organization, improving morale and reducing turnover in the process. How? By examining your existing management development strategies and making sure that the following tactics are in place.

1. Recruitment. Has your organization identified the critical skills that its managers must possess? Do you evaluate candidates based on specific traits that are appropriate for your corporate culture? In short, do you know what you're looking for? The first step in developing effective managers is clearly identifying the skills and competencies that your organization needs. When competencies are appropriately chosen and defined they serve as important criteria against which managerial candidates can be evaluated. Some examples of competencies are: delegating responsibility, establishing strategic direction, operational decision-making, building trust, communications skills or financial acumen. The process of identifying competencies can be time consuming and requires consensus and commitment at the top level of the organization, but it is an important first step in building an effective management staff. Whether promoting managers from within or looking outside the organization, you should only hire those individuals who have the requisite skills and characteristics you've identified as key to success in your organization. An employee with strong technical skills in a particular area is not necessarily a good choice to move up the corporate ladder. Yet in too many organizations that's exactly what happens.

2. Awareness. Do your managers know, specifically, what is expected of them? For example, what is management's role in responding to employee complaints? Are they expected to address organization issues themselves, with support from HR, in concert? What is management's role in supporting the direction and decisions of the organization? If managers are expected to provide input at an appropriate time, participate in the decision-making process and then support the decision regardless of whether they personally believe it was the right direction to take, do they realize that this is an expectation? Are you sure? Too often organizations "assume" that managers know their role, but this can be damaging to the organization. Expectations should be communicated during the hiring process, upon orientation and throughout a manager's tenure with the organization. Be clear about your expectations of managers. Don't assume an awareness or understanding that may not exist.

3. Guide managers through critical tasks. There are certain tasks that every manager will be called upon to perform in most organizations — hiring, orientation and training of staff, evaluation of staff, coaching and discipline. Have you assessed your managers' skills in these areas and done whatever you can to help them through these processes? For example, are "toolkits" available to help walk managers through the hiring process? Through the evaluation process? Again, don't assume that management staff knows what is required of them, understands the processes in place in your organization or is comfortable in performing all of the duties required of them. By providing clarification — even step-by-step instruction — for various common managerial tasks, you can help to simplify and streamline these activities for your managers and minimize the anxiety and uncertainty they may feel. You'll also ensure fair and consistent treatment of employees, minimizing legal liability for your organization in the process.

4. Make training an ongoing requirement for all managers. Some of your managers will be new to their role, others will be seasoned veterans. *Both* need training, albeit different types. While general managerial training courses can serve some value, it is better to design training to meet the specific needs of individual managers. New managers will be overwhelmed if required to attend training designed for more experienced managers. Experienced managers will be frustrated if required to attend basic skills training sessions.

5. Teach managers how to communicate effectively with staff. Communication is a critical function for managers. Few organizations, however, offer specific training or guidance on how to communicate effectively. Managers should know how to effectively:

- o Give constructive feedback.
- o Respond to employee suggestions.
- o Deal with conflict.

They should know how much and how to share information with employees based on the organization's communication preferences and philosophies. To ensure consistent communication, particularly with regard to key organizational issues, consider developing resources and materials for managers like "speaking points" or "handouts" to share with employees.

6. Provide managers with the tools they need. Your organization's managers are important customers for the HR department. The more effectively you can work through them to serve the needs of employees, the more efficient you will be in meeting the organization's needs. Time spent on developing tools — communication tools, training resources, counseling and support resources — to meet the needs of your managers will be time well spent. Not only will you be able to increase efficiencies for the HR department, you will ultimately increase the satisfaction of both managers and employees.

7. Step in quickly to correct behavior when necessary. Sometimes managers need "course correction." Sometimes managers simply are not qualified for the job they're being required to perform. In either case it's important that HR move swiftly to work with the appropriate people to correct these situations. The impact of one manager on an organization can be immense — that impact can be either positive or negative. A poor manager can negatively impact performance, productivity, morale and turnover. Those are problems you don't need.

Organizations can't afford to ignore employee relations issues that can have a negative impact on recruitment and retention. A strong managerial staff is your first-line offense against low morale and high turnover. Make sure that managers know what is expected of them, provide them with the tools and resources to do the job and act quickly to correct behaviors or performance that don't support the organization's goals or philosophies.

By Lin Gensing-Pophal