

## The Real Problem

By Markku Kauppinen

I got my first real management job at the age of 24. I felt very important – after all, I was the youngest manager at the bank that had hired me. I had recently graduated with my MBA and had completed my new employer's management training program. The latter consisted of being shipped around from one department to the next and being shown what the rest of organization did day-to-day. It was all fascinating, but not very helpful. To be honest, the data back-up section was pretty boring.

I even had a chance to do a two-week stint at the bank's brand new grocery store branch. I know you have seen them everywhere. Not exciting, I know. But back then, it was revolutionary stuff and the bank was very proud of how many banking services could be offered from a location that was not much bigger than a phone booth and fit so nicely between the pharmacy and the fresh fruit section. I had been chosen to experience it first hand. I took this as a great honor.

The highlight of the two weeks was a day when I got to do a few PA announcements for the busy grocery shoppers about our amazingly low rates on home equity loans. The shoppers were not very impressed. I only closed three loans - bathroom remodel, a new pool and a trip to see Mickey Mouse. However, I did get some nice comments from the grocery cashiers. They liked my accent. I was clearly ready for management.

I soon discovered that my PA experience did not help all that much in managing people. My degree did not seem to help that much either. It was a great disappointment. I had all the answers for the operational and financial issues. My education and limited experience came very handy there. It was the "people stuff" that turned out to be the most challenging. Motivating employees, assigning projects and tasks,

mediating lunch schedule disagreements, hiring and firing people, dealing with people not getting along with one another – all of this turned out to be amazingly difficult. My professors must have all inadvertently forgotten to cover these topics. The authors of the course text books must have made the same mistake. This "people stuff" had not come up in the university – I would have remembered!

I was frustrated. The "people stuff" was taking up almost a third of my time. What was worse, I felt I was not very effective with it. Meanwhile, I had aggressive goals to meet. More loans, more loans, more fees.

My employees seemed to fall into three main categories. The first, and luckily the clear majority, was great. These employees got the job done, day in and day out. I had this vision of how I wanted them to do their jobs. And they got it and executed. It was beautiful.

The second group, typically about 15% of my employees, was more challenging. Back then, in my expert opinion, they were simply not interested in "reaching their full potential". They did not get me very well. As a result, their performance was only adequate. This group was like a bar of soap. I could not get a good handle on them. What was wrong with these people?

The last group was the toughest. Actually and thankfully, it was not really a group. Depending on the point in time, it was one to three employees. These employees just did not get my vision at all. I basically got blank stares from them. And sub-par performance. I learned what any creative manager learns to do. Try to get them to ask for a transfer to another location. My line: "Are you aware that there is another branch closer to your home? Your commute must be a real pain now." This worked quite well. Problem temporarily solved.

Then one day I realized the **real** problem. It was both terrible and so obvious. The problem was,

for the most part, me! How could this be? I had a great education and had visited every department of the bank; I had even seen the mainframes!

But there was no escaping it. It was me. The problem was actually pretty simple. I was repeating the same behaviors. Consistently, everyday and with everyone. I was just lucky that those behaviors worked so well with most of my employees. They worked because the majority of my employees were a lot like me. They “got me” because they were like me. We saw the world through the same filters.

My 15% group was not that different from me. But clearly enough that they must have been thinking on my worst days: “Do you really get paid for this?” Fair enough.

The last group must have not been so kind to me behind my back. Looking back now, had I been one of them, I would have asked for a transfer. “Location is not important and I am willing to travel.”

In my defense, I was not alone among the management ranks. In fact, with a very few exceptions, I was like everyone else. Not only at my level, but up and down the organization. Everyone was repeating their behaviors. None of us knew how to appropriately modify them with our different styles of employees. The same applied to prospects and customers. We repeated the same things with mixed results.

Thankfully, I have learned a lot since those days. I have a lot to learn still. But I think about what happened to me as a young manager almost every day. The reason is that I get asked about these types of things almost all of the time. “How can I help my managers lead their people better?” What should we do to get our salespeople to hold their salespeople accountable?”

These are the kind of questions that you may be asked by the employees of your organization too. Do you have the answers and the information to help them?

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### **Why Even Thinking About Retirement Can Be a Bad Idea**

By Marshall Goldsmith

We often dream about all the things we'll do once we retire. What we don't think about is how much we'll hate it.

My friend Dave was bubbling with enthusiasm. His company had just been acquired, and he had hit the jack-pot. After years of hard work, he was worth many millions of dollars. To make things even better, he didn't have to stick around through the transition. At only 48, he now had the time, resources, and energy to do whatever he wanted. Dave's face lit up as he described his new future: trips to exotic places, golfing whenever and wherever he liked, unlimited time to enjoy his wife and family. Life was going to be wonderful.

Six months later, Dave was home alone and miserable. The kids were away at college. After the remodeling of their home, his wife had become bored. She poured herself into a new job and seemed to be gone a good deal of the time.

One day, a deliveryman came over to drop off a package. Dave's house was his last stop for the day, so Dave asked him in. Over a cup of coffee, the two engaged in what became a fascinating discussion. The courier surprised Dave with his keen insight into current global problems and his grasp of complex economic issues.

"What a neat conversation," Dave later thought. "In fact, that conversation was so much fun, it was the highlight of my week!"

It was a revelation. When my friend looked in the mirror that afternoon, he saw the face of a guy who had been watching reruns of *Everybody Loves Raymond* on TV. For fun, he was playing mediocre golf and listening to old men at the country club repeat the same old war stories about what they used to do. He asked himself, "Did I just say the highlight of my week was bullshitting with the delivery guy about the world's problems?"

Within two weeks, Dave had a new job. He realized that retirement, or even thinking and planning for retirement, isn't all that it may seem to be.

I have had the privilege of getting to know many of the top thinkers in my field. They could all retire if they wanted to. But most do not. People like Peter Drucker, former Girl Scouts leader Frances Hesselbein, and Warren Bennis are amazing. They just keep on making great contributions. They aren't working for money, prestige, or status. They are working because they love what they do, and they are making a positive difference in the world. Together with my friend Dave, they have taught me a great lesson: Our traditional notion of retirement is greatly overrated.

I was lucky enough to be with one of the most respected consultants in organizational change, Richard Beckhard, a couple of days before he died. Dick was a great coach and mentor, as well as an inspiration for many people in our field. When I last visited him, Dick knew that his life was almost over. His doctor respected him enough to let him know that he was not going to recover, and he needed to say his last farewells.

As I watched Dick answer a series of phone calls, I found him not only saying good-bye. He was continuing to help other people. I was

amazed at the excitement and enthusiasm he was able to convey. He was working with people in the same caring and effective way he always had.

My first thought was, "Dick, why don't you just let it go and take care of yourself? You've done enough."

Fortunately, I kept my mouth shut. Dick was still smiling, still able to laugh, still filled with passion. He knew that he wasn't going to be around to collect the consulting fees for his final assignments. It didn't really matter. He was still doing a great job--even from his deathbed. In that instant, I made a decision. I decided that I wanted to be like Dick Beckhard when I grew up.

How many times have we all thought about how nice it would be to have enough money so that we would never have to work again? We think about all that we won't have to do: We won't have to get up early. We won't have to go to work. We won't have to meet deadlines. We won't have to be stressed. Unfortunately, it is hard to find much fulfillment in what we won't do. We can only find fulfillment and meaning in what we will do.

Dave discovered that quickly enough. Dick taught me that as well. You may well have too much intellectual curiosity and too much enthusiasm for life ever to retire. When and if that day comes, you might not be doing what you're doing now, but you will want to be doing something that matters.

Forget about retirement. Forget about planning for it. Just find something that you love to do. Maybe you can be just like Dick Beckhard when you grow up.

**Dr. Marshall Goldsmith** is a world authority in helping successful leaders achieve positive change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams.