

## **Managing Process**

I believe that we, as practice owners, are missing the boat with regard to how we view our role as managers. We have somehow misinterpreted management to mean that we must oversee and direct the behavior of other people. The implications here are twofold. First, it is implied that we as managers and leaders are responsible for the actions and motivation of our staff. And secondly, there is the implication that our staff is incapable of achieving a desired goal or fulfilling their responsibilities without our guidance. Neither of these assumptions is true if we lead and manage properly. In fact, if we find it necessary to manage the actions of people in our organization who lack motivation and are incapable of productive behavior, we have failed miserably as leaders and managers.

Whenever I speak on the topic of management, I begin by asking the attendees to raise their hands if they believe that they are good “people” managers. Invariably there will be a significant number of hands raised. It seems that most of us believe that we are skilled “people” managers. I then ask if they enjoy managing people, and again a decent number will raise their hand. But when I ask if they enjoy or feel comfortable managing “people” issues like poor attitude, chronic tardiness, or disruptive behavior, no hands are raised. My response is always the same.....”But this is what “people” managers do!” This is when I get a number of blank stares and puzzled looks. This is also when I share with them the reasons why we need to move beyond “people” management to the infinitely more productive and fulfilling realm of managing process.

It is important for leaders and managers to understand that commitment and self motivation are not created by management directives, but rather by aligning organizational values and beliefs

with similar preexisting values and beliefs held by our team members. The most effective leaders and managers are those who realize they cannot change people. Instead, they reduce the need to change people by carefully choosing and inviting selected potential staff members to join their team based on the individual's alignment with the organization's mutually shared values and purpose (also known as the organization's "core ideology"). This form of "prequalifying" on the part of the organization is a critical first step to creating cohesiveness of the organizational culture and the team, and significantly reduces the likelihood for destructive behavior or lack of motivation on the part of new hires. A cohesive team, because of its commitment to the core ideology, becomes a self policing unit that recognizes and deals with these issues. Poor motivation and disruptive behavior simply is not tolerated.

It goes without saying that a well defined organizational culture that creates crystal like clarity with regard to its shared values and purpose will send a clear and unequivocal message to potential team members that allows the prospective members to decide if their own personal core ideology is aligned with that of the organization.

Have you ever stopped to notice that the practices with exceptional leaders/managers at the helm have the lowest staff turnover rates? I would suggest that this is due, to a great degree, to the transparent nature of their core ideology. Because their beliefs and values are front and center for all to see, they are less likely to hire the wrong person. Their culture and core ideology are so well defined that they make a statement to those who would consider joining the organization..... "This is what we believe and who we are. Love us or leave us!" At this point, the prospective team member has sufficient information to decide whether they choose to join the team and adopt its values and beliefs or continue looking for a better fit.

I have also observed that practices which have exceptional leadership are much more likely to have exceptional cultures. And exceptional cultures are more likely to create teams that are engaged in and committed to perpetuating the practice environment. These teams often become very protective of their culture and can be quite vocal when they perceive that someone is threatening to disturb their cultural equilibrium.

Jim Collins states in his bestselling book, *Good to Great*, that it is the leader's responsibility to insure that the "right people are on the bus", which means that the leader is responsible for hiring the right people. This may very well be true, but once the right people or right team is in place, the dynamics begin to change. It has been my experience that a cohesive team which makes their mutually shared core ideology their organizational anchor will ultimately determine who is allowed to get on or off the bus.

Having a committed, self motivated, self policing team should be our ultimate goal as our practice's leader/manager, because it frees us to function at a much higher level of proficiency. Achieving this goal becomes the tipping point at which we no longer are burdened with managing people. Instead we can now focus our energies on managing process, which consists of a series of actions and/or strategies that are fundamental to our practice's success. Leading and managing process requires higher levels of cognition and creativity, and it is our ability to utilize creative thinking that will ultimately distinguish our practices from the competition.

Imagine, if you will, what it is like dealing with people management issues on a daily basis. Some of us know quite well what it means to constantly battle issues like chronic tardiness, poor attitudes, or lack of staff motivation. It is like being in quicksand that you cannot escape, and the more you struggle the more it pulls you down and drains you physically and mentally. It would

be difficult, if not impossible to utilize higher levels of cognition and creativity if we lack physical stamina or mental acuity

Now consider what rising above the fray would look like. How much more effective would you be if your team was self managing and self policing, and you were no longer encumbered by the quicksand. Imagine what it would be like if you could preserve your precious energy and use it to focus on that which is essential to your personal fulfillment and your practice's success.

Rising above the fray elevates us to a vantage point from which we are able to see and experience the big picture, and it is from this vantage point that we can best lead and manage our practices.

An essential prerequisite to managing process is to not only have confidence that your staff is cohesive and self motivated, but to insure their success by providing them with the necessary knowledge and resources to succeed. In his landmark book, *First, Break all the Rules*, Marcus Buckingham states that even an exceptional team needs to know and visualize the desired end result, but a wise leader, having provided them with the appropriate resources and knowledge, will let them find their own path to achieving this result. These same leaders understand and appreciate that, at this point, their practice has evolved to a much better place.

