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SPECIAL REPORT

Leading Your Team to the Top

Creating and Sustaining a Profit Culture in Your Business

By Libby Wagner, Founder and President

If, at the heart of everything personal and professional is the important significance of relationship, what is the most important relationship you have at work? In a landmark study of hundreds of organizations I, interviews with thousands of workers and managers, The Gallup Organization found that the most significant, most important relationship that you will have is that with your immediate supervisor—that person who has direct responsibility over your work performance.

This report is designed to offer some important things to consider when making decisions about performance management in your organization, whether your role is a C-Level executive or whether you're leading a team, business unit or group. The same principles apply—though the application may be different. This is not comprehensive—since it's a report and not a book! However, you have access to several resources that can add to your expertise in managing performance:

- **Access free articles online** at www.libbywagner.com. Each month, new articles on leadership, performance, strategy, communication, work/life balance, etc. are added to the available topics. You can also sign up for our free newsletter containing both practical advice and inspiring ideas to add value to your role as a leader.
- **Take an Influencing Options course.** Influencing Options courses, including Influencing Skills and Managing for High Performance and Retention, allow hands-on practice for many of the skills and tools featured here in this report. To learn more, visit www.influencingoptions.com.
- **Contact Libby Wagner, president of Professional Leadership Results, Inc.** I help leaders align their people with their visions! You may decide to access the expertise of someone who knows, who has an objective viewpoint and years of experience working with clients to help them create maximum impact on employee performance. Contact me at libby@libbywagner.com or call 206.906.9203.

I Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*. New York: Simon & Schuster: 1999. (The Gallup Organization Study)

Think of a time when you had a really good boss or supervisor. What made that person a good boss? What made them fun to work for or easy to learn from? What about that person helped you be good at that job you were doing? Much research has been done to identify what makes great managers and supervisors, and contrary to some conventional thinking, they do not have 10 special characteristics that are all the same. Some are organized and some are not. Some are good communicators and some are not. Some have gone to years of school and some have not. But one characteristic that good supervisors and managers do share is that they have the **ability** and the **desire** and the **commitment** to help you identify your strengths and to help you become stronger and more excellent in those strengths. They are invested in your potential.

You might be thinking, that's just great—I've met my boss and I don't think she's staying up nights thinking about how to help me be good at anything. In fact, I'm not sure she knows my name and I'm not sure she even has time to talk to me, much less invest in my success!

Let's talk about that for a minute.

Even though I think managers, bosses and supervisors can get caught up in all kinds of "important" stuff, like paperwork and reports and e-mails and meetings and conference calls—what I like to call **administrivia**—there's nothing more important than your success, either to you, your boss, your organization. Nothing. In fact, we're counting on your success!

But that doesn't let you off the hook. You have a responsibility in this important relationship, too. And like any relationship, to make it work, you have to invest time, communication and commitment. I know that many of you can relate when I identify one fatal error to make in any personal relationship—like a marriage or partnership—and that is to expect the other person to read your mind. This gets us into all sorts of trouble—the expecting of mind reading—and even if you think you've been with someone for a really long time and they can read your mind, you might be better off not expecting them to, and you surely cannot expect your new boss to do it! This means you have to ask for what you need and what you want.

What might this look like? How are you going to go about it, especially if you don't know enough to ask the right kinds of questions yet? You will learn from everyone you encounter in your job—your peers, your supervisors, people who work in other units or areas. But one of the most **important** learning relationships is with your supervisor. What if you meet your supervisor, or you already know him or her, and she seems a little disconnected? She seems too busy to talk with you, or he's rarely around your actual place of work? How is that supposed to be a significant relationship and one that may hold the key to your success? How can you begin to develop that relationship when it doesn't seem to you like she wants to have one with you? Well, 99.9% of the people I've ever met love to talk about themselves. You can always start there! Ask, 'how long have you been working with this organization?' or 'what brought you to work in this field?' or 'what do you like best about working here?' Although this may seem like an insignificant way to begin, it actually prepares the way for the relationship and suggests to your supervisor that you're open to learning and listening, and that may help him or her begin to get to know you better, too. This is important, remember, because their job is to help you develop your strengths in your new role, and they can't do that if they don't **know you**.

Initially, you may want to share some things with your new supervisor so that he/she knows a little about how you learn or how you like to be supervised. If you know that you'd like instruction and then you want to try it before getting feedback, share that. Or, if you prefer someone show you step-by-step, allowing you to practice as you go, ask for that. Or, you may be the kind of person who learns after you can see a model or illustration of something, ask for that. How do you like to receive feedback? How do you like to receive praise? One size does not fit all, and you're more likely to get what you need or want by asking for it specifically. This may also pave the way for you to ask more specific questions along the way when they come up. You can also ask your new supervisor how s/he prefers communication. Face-to-face? Telephone? E-mail? Do you need an appointment? If you don't work closely with him/her often, how should you stay connected? How would they like you to check in with them or give you updates or ask questions?

In the **Ken Blanchard Company's Situational Self-Leadership® model**, students are taught to analyze their developmental levels with particular tasks or projects. They ask themselves specific questions about where they are in

relation to their commitment or attitude toward a task and their level of competence or knowledge in relation to that task. For example, many beginning learners are really excited and enthusiastic about the task ahead, even though they have no idea, really, what to do—they just want to do it. What they might ask for is direction—help understanding the steps or techniques or skills in performing a particular task. So, for example, I may be really enthusiastic to learn a new skill, like water skiing. I think I can do it because I like to swim and I've been snow skiing since I was a kid. Well, anyone who knows these distinct sports probably also knows that the one thing they have in common is skis, and that's about it. I would be at Developmental Level 1, with regards to water skiing because I'm excited about it and I have a great attitude, but I don't know anything about it. I would want someone to help me learn the basics, step-by-step. Once the Blanchard students can perform this type of self analysis, then they can ask for what they need. Other times, they may know exactly how to do something, but they're beginning to feel as if their heart is just not in it, or they're bored or don't see the point, this is Developmental Level 3.

What they might ask for is support or encouragement or a new challenge. In another sports example, I may already know how to run, another sport I've been doing since I was a kid, but lately, I can't seem to get my shoes on and get out the door. I seem to have lost my motivation or commitment, even though I'm a pretty decent runner. A good coach would encourage me in different ways, offer an incentive of some sort or a new challenge. I don't need someone to tell me how to run because I know that, what I need is someone to help me get motivated to do it! Throughout your career, you will move fluidly among levels of commitment and competence, each time you learn a new skill or task, you'll begin at the beginning and you'll need different types of supervision to become successful. Good supervisors can give both direction and support, but sometimes they may need some help from you—remember they can't read your minds—so think about this when you are communicating with them.

Excellent work should not be a secret, magical thing that only a few obtain and we're not sure how they do it. Excellence for you will be based on you utilizing your own strengths to perform the standards of your job with the help of your supervisor behind you. You have a responsibility to your own potential development and you truly enter in a partnership with your supervisor as you are working together. Get to know your supervisor and be willing to commit to communicating your questions and ideas about your work performance.

Suggested Resources

First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently. Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. 1999.

The Unofficial Guide to Power Managing. Alan Weiss. 2000.

Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Field Guide. Patrick Lencioni. 2005.

The Carrot Principle: How the Best Managers Use Recognition to Engage Their People, Retain Talent and Accelerate Performance. Adrian Gostick and Chester Elton. 2007.

Managing for High Performance and Retention. (course text) Libby Wagner. 2008.

American Society for Training and Development. www.astd.org

International Society for Performance Improvement. www.ispi.org



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