

# Understanding employee is the key to success

## 'Seeking first to understand, then to be understood' is an important habit of effective interpersonal relations

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Many years back, a Sales Manager listened patiently, as I explained the need to transfer him with promotion, to Chennai. After seeking clarifications, he was happy to accept the decision, since it was in line with his career plan. Media industry being very competitive, the need to transfer an experienced employee, to a challenging market, was crucial. I was happy that the issue was resolved, in a spirit of win-win.

However, I had not anticipated the possibility of intervention by an unseen dimension. The next morning, he withdrew his acceptance for the promotional transfer, explaining that his wife was unwilling to move out of Bangalore.

A few years later, another key employee came in to make an unusual request for a transfer from his current location. The background was interesting: he had just married and wanted to set up his family, away from his over-dominating mother.

The author of best selling book, 'The seven habits of highly effective people', Stephen Covey says, "Each of us have a centre, though we usually don't recognise it as such."

He further explains, "If our sense of emotional worth comes primarily from our marriage, then we become highly

dependent upon that relationship. We become highly vulnerable to the moods and feelings, the behaviour and treatment of our spouse or to any external event that might impinge on that relationship." In a workplace, it is common to find employees who are spouse-centric. Other influencing and highly vulnerable centres could be family, work, money, pleasure, self and so on. **Human beings are complicated**

Human beings are complicated in nature, tending to do things differently, intrigued by an innate desire and influenced by internal and external motives. An unsuspecting superior, might not anticipate such unexpected behavioural changes in employees. American novelist Henry Miller has expressed this beautifully: 'Man is a master of everything, except his own nature.'

In due course, every leader understands this complicated dimension of employees and learns to deal with the dynamics of their behaviour. I also discovered that these vulnerable factors could also influence in a positive way. As a result, I started a new practice of informally discussing with the families before taking final decisions on transfers of 'spouse and family centric employees' to key locations.

This practice ensured we picked the right people for the right jobs and was termed em-



ployee friendly too. After identifying factors influencing employees, the obvious questions that arise are, what should a leader do? Will he not abrogate his primary responsibility and accountability, by allowing these influencing factors to

override his professional decision-making?

From a professional perspective, one can argue against the necessity of adapting leadership style, based on employee influencing factors. However, in people-centric businesses,

an understanding of these factors and developing leadership style, without compromising professional values, is not only possible but desirable too.

Because, ignoring employee-motivating factors, can easily trigger and aggravate attri-

tion rates, negatively influencing productivity factors such as sales turnover, CRM, service quality and others.

It is a common experience that understanding motivating aspects of employees and dealing with it appropriately, helps building personal relations and mutual trust. This leads to emotional bonding, which often extends beyond professional relationship. Such a relationship lasts longer and is an invaluable asset especially while dealing with crisis.

Elaborating this aspect of leader-subordinate relationship, Stephen Covey says, 'Seeking first to understand, then to be understood' is an important habit of highly effective people in interpersonal relations and leads to a situation of win-win in interdependence and organisational synergy.

However, the dividing line between being professional and personal is thin, varying all the time, depending on the situation, the position and importance of the employee and your own mindset. Leaders must never forget their primary responsibility and be prepared to take tough decisions, whenever justified.

**Developing people-oriented leadership**

The process of developing people oriented leadership style hinges on a combined focus of getting results through people. The following tips should help: ■ Empathetic listening: Devel-

op a keen sense of observation. Engage employees in informal conversations; develop empathetic listening skills to understand their professional and personal lives.

■ Identify motivating factors: For each of your key employees, identify primary motivating factors such as spouse, family, money, work, pleasure and so on.

■ Interact tactfully: Keeping in view motivating factors, interact on key issues intelligently and tactfully avoiding misunderstandings and conflicts.

■ Delegate effectively: While delegating tasks, try to find a match between employee benefit and the motivating factor. For example, when you have a choice of three equally competent people for a promotional transfer, choose the one who is more career centric.

■ People orientation: Most importantly, develop a people oriented leadership style, modifying your line of communication to each key employee as the situation demands. In specific situations, your style may acquire varying degrees of professionalism, without compromising your unique leadership style.

**New challenges post globalisation**

A flat global world has meant increased opportunities in India, which has attributed to a change in employee attitude and an increase in attrition rates. Middle level man-

agers across diverse industries highlight practical issues and illustrate live examples of people, ready to resign with slightest provocation. Illustrating the reality of such challenges, Rodrigues D'Souza, a senior banking professional says, "One of my staff did a silly mistake due to which we lost an important customer. I took it up strongly with the employee and next morning, he resigned. Management felt, I should have handled the issue tactfully."

Such minor lapses, errors of judgement or lack of tact, can prove detrimental and hence leading employees is a greater challenge post globalisation.

While dealing with such challenges at workplace, you must remember that the primary responsibility is to get results, through a deeper understanding of employee motives, and deciding a tactical approach.

Renowned management guru Peter Drucker describes leadership as: "lifting a person's vision to higher sights, the raising of a person's performance to a higher standard." In the final analysis, leadership style is the development of individual personality comprising of the ways of understanding employees, thinking and taking different approaches as are required in pursuit of results.

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