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Improving Workplace Performance, Morale, and Retention

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ABSTRACT

Supervisors should be more engaged with employees, encourage their success, and establish a personal connection with them in order to ensure they are happy, successful, motivated, and productive in the modern police environment. Performance management is a subject that comes up frequently in all types of work settings. The law enforcement career field is no different. Supervisors often have officers who are less motivated than desired. The supervisor is continually spending time and effort, trying to get employees to perform their required work tasks as instructed.

Some employees are hard workers and do as instructed with little or no supervision. There are others, however, that take the majority of the supervisor's time, since they regularly do not do what they are supposed to or they do not meet established deadlines for completing assigned tasks. This causes the supervisor to have to check on the problem employee's progress frequently and continually speak with these employees about their failure to meet performance standards. This is not only frustrating for the supervisor and the employee, but it takes valuable time from the supervisor that could be used to interact with the other employees in the work center and to complete their own assignments. Some supervisors use the old approach to motivating employees with substandard work performance and move straight to disciplinary counseling or written reprimands. Other supervisors may have a two-way conversation with the employee to determine the root of the problem in order to correct the undesirable work performance. Herein lays the two supervisory styles that are typically used in law enforcement today.

The position of the researcher is that most employees will respond in a positive fashion if an open two-way dialog and pleasant working relationship is established between supervisors and subordinates. Employees of all ages want to be respected and commonly resent being treated like they do not have a mind of their own. Generation Y or Millennials especially want to be involved in ways subordinates have never been before when it comes to workplace decision making and work center performance expectations. The types of information that will be used to support the researcher's position are periodicals, a review of articles, and books.

The conclusion drawn from this research will be that developing relationships with subordinates that go beyond that of supervisor/subordinate will increase performance and morale when subordinate's needs are met, their voices are heard, they are respected, and they are involved in the decision making and policy processes of the work center. Subordinates will do what they are expected to do because they want to do it, not because they have to. Research will show that this level of performance is more quickly and easily achieved when the supervisor takes an active role in getting to know the employee and establishes a rapport with the subordinate that does not always revolve around work topics. The research will also show that the employee's satisfaction level will be high enough under these working conditions to maintain a high morale and to retain a high number of employees.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Abstract

Introduction 1

Position 2

Counter Position 9

Recommendation 13

References 15

INTRODUCTION

Police organizations are traditionally para-military organizations and, as such, are operated very much in an authoritative military style. In years past, this style of supervision and leadership was acceptable but not necessarily the most effective method available. Unfortunately, as a new generation of supervisors came through the ranks, they learned this antiquated style of supervision and passed it along to the next generation. Organizations should strive to motivate and inspire their employees to perform at a high level because the employee's needs have been met and because they want to perform well, not because they are forced to.

Most police organizations' first line officers are currently Generation X and Millennials. These two groups are very different in thought process, motivation, and professional goals as compared to the older generations that make up the large majority of the supervisory ranks at this time. This presents a huge communication gap between the groups. Many supervisors have learned the military style of supervision where orders are given bluntly, and compliance is demanded based upon organizational policies, procedures, rules, and rank structure.

The goal is to bring these two groups together to understand each other and to find an effective way to obtain compliance with organizational goals and expected levels of performance while maintaining sufficient staffing levels for effective police service for the community (Bruce & Pepitone,1999). Generation X and Millennials do not respond well to military style supervision, and they not only want to know why something needs to be done, but why it has to be done a particular way. They also frequently want to have input into the method decided upon. Generation X and Millennials need to feel like

they are part of a team and are included in decisions. They also need to have a bond or connection with their leaders or supervisors in order to respect the direction they are given (Fournies, 2007).

In order to keep the younger generations that are now filling the workforce in law enforcement and elsewhere happy, motivated, and effective, supervisors today must make an effort to get to know their subordinates and become their friends to some degree so there is a positive bond. When the younger worker knows they can trust and respect their supervisor and they know that the supervisor has their welfare at heart, the worker will do what is required of them because they want to, not because they are being forced to. This deep level of trust, loyalty, and respect is not typically established by military style supervision.

The research conducted will reveal confirmation of the motivational factors for employees, with particular attention given to Generation X and Millennials. The research will also produce evidence of improved performance, morale, retention, and job satisfaction when the proper supervisory methods are utilized. Since many law enforcement supervisors are stuck using outdated and ineffective methods that were created decades ago, today's supervisors should ensure that employees have more involvement, more attention, and a personal connection with supervisors in order to be happy, efficient, and productive in the modern police environment.

POSITION

Leaders should get to know their subordinates in order to know what motivates them and in order to gain their respect and understanding (Grinder, 2003). Bruce and Pepitone (1999) advised that there is no better way to obtain a high level of

performance from subordinates than to know what motivates them personally and then use that information to give them what they need. Once they have what they need, then, typically, they will give the organization what it needs.

Police officers and police supervisors typically acknowledge many of the same workplace problems and concerns: low morale, high expectations, a disconnect between management and the workforce, distrust of each other, and a lack of understanding of the other. A major factor in workplace misunderstandings between supervisors and subordinates is that the two groups too often do not really get to know each other. The typical law enforcement supervisor/subordinate relationship is based on an antiquated paramilitary model that has been in place for many, many years. There is a distinct rank structure with a stringent rule requiring employees to follow the chain of command when making inquiries or addressing workplace issues. This type of workplace model does not encourage quality two-way communication between different groups. It also discourages subordinates from questioning policies or procedures. Some of these policies and procedures have been in place for tens of years, and are still being followed because “that is the way we have always done it.”

The problem is that the emerging back-bone of the workforce is Generation Y or Millennials. Bruce and Pepitone (1999) stated that in order to understand employees, whether it is supervisors or subordinate workers, generational differences must be identified in the workforce and those differences must be understood. Generation Y/Millennials are very different from most Generation X and Baby Boomer supervisors. Millennials were generally born between 1977 and 2002 and developed their work ethic from their doting parents (Armour, 2005). Growing up, they had very structured lives

and had interaction with a diverse group of people. They are used to working in teams and are very social. They were spoiled and protected by their parents and seldom were allowed to lose at anything. This was the generation where everyone received a ribbon after participating in childhood competitions and sports.

Millennials seek leadership and structure but want their supervisors and managers to ask their opinion and seek their input as well despite their relative young age and lack of experience. Millennials seek out challenges and get bored easily if not challenged frequently. They are great multi-taskers and are adept with technology since they grew up texting, emailing, Facebooking, and playing video games with a previously unprecedented access to computers. Millennials want and need flexibility in their personal and professional life. Friends and family are very important, as are their social lives and hobbies. They need to know their career path and be able to see exactly how to get to where they want to be professionally.

Since Millennials are so connected to the cyber world, they have lots of contacts and exchange information in a way never seen before in past generations. They will network their way into another job if their needs are not met by their current employer. Generation Y/Millennials “are less likely to respond to traditional command-and-control type management” that is pervasive in law enforcement (Armour, 2005, para. 6). Armour (2005) stated, “Generation Y has been pampered, nurtured, and raised with a slew of activities since they were toddlers, meaning they are both high-performance and high maintenance. They also believe in their own worth” (Armour, 2005, para. 5). Millennials grew up questioning their parents, teachers, friends, and anything they either

did not understand or agree with. Now they are questioning their employers (Armour, 2005).

Generation X consists generally of people born between 1964 and 1977 (Tulgan, 2004). Characteristics of Generation X (Gen X) include them being individualistic, resourceful, independent, and self-sufficient. Some of this can be attributed to being the “latch-key” generation of two working parent households. Gen X children came home to an empty house after school, let themselves in, fixed their own food, and entertained themselves. This had a huge impact on their characteristics as adults. They dislike micro-management, have a casual dislike of authority, and embrace a hands-off management style. Gen X employees are more likely to be less committed to one employer as many saw their parents get burned out or laid-off by employers they stayed loyal to. This generation works hard and plays hard. They work to live and enjoy humor and games at work. They do not like work meetings and do not require face time with their bosses, unlike many Baby Boomers (Tulgan, 2004).

Baby Boomers were generally born between 1946 and 1964 (Tulgan, 2004). They are known as being very hard working, often staying after hours and working weekends to get ahead. They are work-centric. They are commonly referred to as the workaholic generation. They are confident, independent, and believe they can change the world. They frequently question authority systems and are not afraid of confrontation. Baby Boomers are goal oriented, welcome challenging projects, and are competitive. They strongly desire face time with their supervisors in order to get ahead. Baby Boomers are the more traditional style workers and supervisors. They live to work (Tulgan, 2004). Bruce and Pepitone (1999) wrote that with knowledge of the

generational differences, a successful leader must utilize that information to tailor their interaction and supervision of each subordinate to that particular subordinate's needs and desires in order to motivate each subordinate. One subordinate may be motivated by a pat on the back, another by receiving an award. Still others may be more interested in preferential scheduling or assignment. Generation Xers will not be motivated or satisfied in the same ways that a Millennial will. By using the definitions given previously for each of the three major generations in the workplace today, a modern leader will be able to recognize what it takes to get the best performance, morale, and retention out of each employee.

Upon assuming a leadership role in a workplace, the leader should set goals, expectations, standards, and consequences (positive/negative), so that everyone is working in the same direction to achieve organizational goals while operating under the same ethical standards (Fournies, 2007). This is a very important foundation that is absolutely necessary in order to have an efficient and successful organization. It would be counterproductive to have employees working in a multitude of directions, sometimes not even knowing where they or the organization is going. Respect, both up and down the chain of command, should start here and should be built upon and earned as time goes on. Fournies (2007) stated that expectations, incentives, and consequences should be addressed. Employees should know that they will be rewarded for positive behavior and performance. They should also be advised of the consequences of sub-standard or poor performance. This is all part of establishing the standards.

The effective leader must have certain traits and qualities that encourage subordinates to respect them and want to be led by them (Sarver, 2003). This is accomplished in many ways. A successful leader should always be a person of their word and always be honest with their subordinates. If the truth cannot be told due to unavoidable situations or confidentiality considerations, then the employee should be told that an answer cannot be given instead of being untruthful. Subordinates have to know that they can trust what their supervisor says and what they do (Canfield & Miller, 1996). The leader should not only say they are there to support the subordinates but should prove it by their actions every day. Action always speaks louder than words. If subordinates see through their supervisor's actions, and realize that they have the subordinate's best interests and well-being at heart, it will earn the subordinate's respect and admiration.

Employees should be treated with respect and dignity regardless of their position in the organization. Nothing positive is accomplished by demeaning a person. If a subordinate is treated fairly, honestly, and with respect, then it is much easier to receive the same in return. No two employees need to be supervised in the same manner since each employee is motivated differently, but all employees should be treated equally and fairly. There is a difference. The effective leader should always be approachable and have a pleasant demeanor in order to ensure effective communication with subordinates (Fournies, 2007). No one wants to work with or for a moody person. This will discourage subordinates from approaching their supervisor with new ideas, suggestions for improvement, or problems that need to be addressed. That would contribute to stifling innovation and creativity in the workplace, which would be in direct

contradiction to the goals of the organization. Leaders should strive to live by the Golden Rule: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (King James Version, Matthew 7:12).

A good leader should also recognize the positive effect of fun and laughter in the workplace. Some might view this as unprofessional, but laughter and humor in the workplace is commonly underrated (Bruce & Pepitone, 1999). Subordinates will start to develop a bond with a leader who can laugh and joke with them. It makes the leader seem more like them, more human, and develops some commonality. No one wants to work for a “stuffed shirt” who is a supervisory robot, with no emotion and no connection to their people. Making work fun does wonders for morale and productivity (Veeck & Williams, 2005). Bruce and Pepitone (1999) found that “When employees are tired or feeling down, stressed, or just not in the mood to work up to their abilities, a laugh can make a big difference” (p. 90).

Bruce and Pepitone (1999) stated that in order to motivate employee performance, the leader must get to know their employees on a personal and professional level. What this means is that a leader needs to know about their subordinates family situation, likes, dislikes, hobbies, personality, and motivators as well as de-motivating factors. This will require a leader to have conversations with their subordinates about topics that do not involve work. This does not require a supervisor to become their “buddy,” or to delve too deeply into personal matters, but rather to take an obvious interest in their likes and dislikes. Developing a bond in this manner, in conjunction with the aforementioned positive leadership and supervisory traits, will create a supervisor/subordinate relationship that will produce a happy, motivated

employee. This employee will want to impress their supervisor and will want their supervisor's approval because they respect and like them. The old saying "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar" still holds true today. A supervisor does not need to be liked by an employee in order to be an effective supervisor or leader, but it will make their duties and goals much easier to achieve and much less stressful if they do.

Fournies (2007) cited another factor that deals with motivation and performance and that is how discipline and corrective counseling are handled. Much too often in law enforcement and in corporate America, employees are chastised and disciplined when they make a mistake. While mistakes and errors cannot go unaddressed, strong consideration should be given to putting a positive twist on these situations when the mistake was a mistake of the heart and not the mind. An honest mistake can be turned into a training opportunity for the employee involved and for the remainder of the workforce as well. The leader should have a conversation with the employee to find out what contributed to the mistake being made and develop cooperative steps to prevent the mistake from happening again. In the case of an error or mistake being made that the employee knew was wrong from the beginning but chose to engage in the unacceptable conduct anyway, then prompt and straight-forward actions should be taken to investigate the situation and assess the disposition fairly and equitably in accordance with agency policies.

COUNTER POSITION

Traditional police supervision and organizational rank structure are paramilitary in style and structure. This organizational arrangement does not easily lend itself to

building personal relationships with subordinates or taking the time and effort to find out what each individual officer “needs” in order to function at a high level of performance. Even though the different generations have different desires, the police organization structure and management style needs to maintain control and dictate to the employees how they should perform their duties in order to provide safety and security for the citizenry (Wilson, 1972). Millennials are the leaders of the future, yet their needs and desires are completely opposite of the traditional law enforcement organizational model for management and supervision. Law enforcement organizations have been operating in the same general manner (para-military) for many, many years. There has never been a requirement to change that style to accommodate a particular generation.

Baby Boomers were different than Generation X, yet no change was made for those differences in expectations and needs. Wilson (1972) stated that the law enforcement organizational model is designed to provide order when there is chaos elsewhere. There is a distinct operating method, a distinct chain of command, and decision making structure, and there is a system that normally puts the more experienced officers with more varied assignments, broader knowledge, and experience in positions of leadership and authority in order to pass on that knowledge and experience to the next generation of officers. Officers should be prepared for the management style of the traditional law enforcement agency since most agencies are organized as para-military organizations, and employees should not expect to be coddled (Wilson, 1972).

While police organizations are traditionally organized in a strict para-military style hierarchy, a more people oriented supervisory style can be blended with the military

chain of command to form a hybrid operating model. Supervisors getting to know their subordinates desires and motivators and creating a positive working environment will easily go hand in hand with a police chain of command structure (Grinder, 2003). A happy employee who has their needs met generally produces a better quality and quantity of work, with less prodding from management. This is the most effective method to attain an organization's goals (Grinder, 2003).

Traditional supervisory training and experience says that there should not be fraternization between subordinates and supervisors/leaders (Wilson, 1972). Friendships and relationships on a personal level can complicate the workplace and make it difficult for subordinates to follow orders and for leaders to discipline and direct subordinates who may be their "friends." There should be a distinct separation of worker and supervisor. This separation prevents any misinterpretation of the roles of each person. This will also prevent any hard feelings over discipline, corrections, or assignment.

Bruce and Pepitone (1999) recognized that in order to motivate employees and get the best performance from them, a supervisor or manager must get to know them. The supervisor should spend time with the employee in the workplace, watch them work, and talk to them to find out what their interests and desires are. Only then can the supervisor know what will motivate a particular employee. A supervisor who does this will quickly realize that each employee is motivated differently, and must be dealt with as an individual as much as the nature of the work or business allows. Trying to manage under a para-military style system prevents supervisors from forming any type

of bond with their subordinates, and therefore stifles two-way communication. This will make it almost impossible for a supervisor to determine what motivates the employees.

According to Wilson (1972), the most effective style of management for law enforcement is strict control, a distinct chain of command, and strict adherence to orders. Many times in police work, an order must be carried out quickly and without question, much like in the military, or lives could be lost. There is no time for explaining the why something must be done in order to make an officer happy. Officers should know what the organizational expectations are without having to be told. It is as simple as an employee doing what they are told, when they are told, and how they are told (Wilson, 1972).

One problem with the traditional para-military style of supervision and leadership promoted by Wilson (1972) is that he believed orders must be followed without question because there is no time to explain or lives may be lost. While this is true during a critical incident, there is far more time spent with subordinates in non-critical work environments. Fournies (2007) noted, “Don’t worry about why, just do it,” or “We don’t have the time to sit around answering all of your questions; just go do what you get paid to do” (p. 3) are good examples of how not to manage people. Fournies (2007) also stated, “Only dumb managers would say that. Enlightened managers know that it is all right for employees to ask “why?” (p. 3). People from all backgrounds want to be treated and spoken to with dignity, respect, and to be able to retain a certain level of self-esteem regardless of their position in an organization (Fournies, 2007).

RECOMMENDATION

It is quite obvious from the research that understanding the needs and desires of the different generations of employees will give the leader a greater insight into what will motivate their subordinates to perform at a high level and maintain a high level of morale. If the leader understands what motivates the employee and provides what the employee needs to be satisfied, then it is easy to see that the employee will do what is asked of them due to having their needs fulfilled. This will also translate into a satisfied employee who will be less likely to leave the organization.

Setting standards, identifying organizational goals, and explaining positive and negative consequences of performance levels prevents misunderstandings and lets the subordinates know where they and the organization is going. It is much easier to achieve goals if everyone involved knows what the goal is and how to get there. One of the most common mistakes in an organization is when leaders assume that the employees know what the standards, goals, and performance expectations are.

Any employee will respond well to being treated fairly, being well informed, and being treated as a valuable part of a team. In addition, they will also respond favorably to having their needs met, being included in processes and decisions when possible, and knowing that their supervisor truly cares about them and their development. When a leader can develop a relationship with subordinates that goes beyond the boss/worker level, then a mutual respect is developed, and a bond is formed that will result in the subordinate doing what they are supposed to do because they want to, and not because they have to. The subordinates who have such a positive environment in which to work will go above and beyond the minimum performance standards because

they know, like, and respect their supervisor. They will want to impress their supervisor and to stay in his or her good graces because they are grateful for receiving fair and positive treatment.

The idea that antiquated military style management would be effective in today's law enforcement workplace is ludicrous. Today's employees will not respond well to a strong-handed military style form of supervision. No one likes to be ordered to perform their duties. No one likes to be treated like a mindless zombie with no opinion or thoughts of their own. Research revealed that it was very difficult to locate any current information that encourages a return to the traditional para-military style of law enforcement management. Current books, journals, periodicals, magazines, and websites that were found by the researcher universally promoted the methods and management style recommended in this paper in one form or another (Armour, 2005; Bruce & Pepitone, 1999; Grinder, 2003; Tulgan, 2004). The researcher was hard pressed to find any material that would contradict these more effective and more modern methods. The only material found in opposition to the current recommended management methods were dated in the 1970's.

In summary, it was found to be more effective to treat employees with honesty and respect, maintain an open two-way line of communication, and show them that they are valuable and cared about. Mentoring and giving them the tools to succeed and grow and allowing them to appropriately challenge current processes in order to be involved in the growth and success of the organization is what the younger, growing workforce expects and desires.

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