



Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

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Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse or DC

From the Golden Zone

What a leader must know to be successful

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Today there is too much focus on analytics, technology, and software as the answer to management problems.

Many experts will tell you that systems dictate process rather than support process. They will focus on managing processes, equipment, inventory, space, data, and information.

Yet, without leadership intertwined with reality, any effort to enable technology, information systems, process reengineering, and knowledge management is doomed from the start.

In your warehousing and distribution operations, and in your workers' eyes, your leadership is everything you do that affects operations and worker well-being. If you want to be a respected leader, concentrate on what you are (your beliefs and character), what you know (human nature, process application, and your job), and what you do (provide direction, implement, and motivate).

Leadership factors

Four things are needed for leadership to occur: the follower, the leader, communication, and the situation. They have a significant impact on what actions the leader should take and when he should take them.

The Follower. Different workers require different styles of leadership. For example, a truck

driver fresh from driver training requires more direct supervision than an experienced driver. An inventory analyst with a poor attitude requires a different approach than a highly motivated one.

A union shop with older, long-term employees requires different work incentives than a non-union, high-turnover facility with an under-30 or Gen Y workforce. An order picker with very little industry or commodity expertise will need more coaching.

You must know your employees if you want to take the right leadership actions at the right time. The fundamental starting point is a clear understanding of human nature (needs, emotions, and motivations).

You must understand the “be,” “know,” and “do” attributes of each one of your people. The be is what he or she is — human nature, beliefs, values, and character. The know is his or her knowledge based on experience, training, and expertise. The do is what he or she is capable of accomplishing through this skill set.

One of the keys to good leadership is to hire the right people. How? Based on two factors: job competence and values fit.

If the person doesn't have the right skills and values, do not hire him or her under any circumstances.

Also, you are a follower as well as a leader. You have to find ways of meeting the goals of your boss, other key people, and yourself. To

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accomplish this, you must understand the different levels within your organization, have good communication skills, and develop relationships based on trust and respect.

The Leader. You must have an honest understanding of who you are, what you know, and what you can do. You must be able to separate perception from reality.

By way of example, good leaders are clear thinking and calm under pressure. How does your perception coincide with the reality in pressure situations? This understanding is necessary in order for you to control and discipline yourself and your employees effectively.

Remember that leadership is:

- 10 percent technical direction
- 20 percent administration
- 30 percent guiding employees
- 40 percent employee motivation.

Communication. You lead through two-way communication. Much of this is not verbal. You teach, coach, counsel, persuade, and discipline through both verbal and non-verbal communication.

The way you communicate in different situations is important. Your choice of words, tone of voice, and physical gestures, as well as the look in your eye, affect the way a person feels about what you communicate.

Leadership is more than setting the example. The right word or the right body language — spoken at the right moment or an acknowledgement after a difficult job — is also an important part of leadership.

What and how you communicate either builds or harms the strength of the relationship between you and your employees. In a healthy relationship between people, there are bonds of mutual trust, respect, confidence, and understanding.

These bonds form the basis of productivity and cohesion in any distribution operation. They are built over time as your followers (employees) learn — from training, from experience, and from what you communicate — that you are a competent leader whom they can trust and respect.

The Situation. All situations are different. Leadership actions that worked in one situation with one person or group may not work in another situation. Many forces combine to determine the best leadership action to take at a particular time.

By identifying and influencing certain forces, you can create a situation more favorable to success. This is commonly known as situational leadership.

There are no rules or formulas to tell you exactly what to do. You need to understand the four factors of leadership (and human nature) and to apply these as guides in particular situations. Then use your judgment to decide the best action to take and what leadership style to use.

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