



Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse or DC

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To lead based on trust, lead the HIT parade

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Getting your DC team to trust you can be difficult. Trust is earned by leaders, not granted by automatic respect for your position or title.

While there's no shortcut to gaining the trust of your people, there are some simple, straightforward guidelines that can help you. They're found in the acronym HIT — honesty, integrity, and teamwork.

Trust is such an inherent part of leadership that Tom Ridge, former governor of Pennsylvania, called it “a great force multiplier.” Without trust, you have no followers. And without followers, you're not really a leader.

Here's how to lead your own HIT parade:

Honesty. People want to know what's going on. When you keep things close and don't share, you kill morale and create an atmosphere of distrust. Then workers rely on rumors for their information. Honesty is the best way of establishing credibility with the workforce.

My philosophy is “tough but fair.” Most people don't mind a boss who is strict, demanding, and quick to offer (not always positive) feedback, as long as he or she treats every worker fairly. There's a big difference between treating each worker the same and treating every worker fairly. As Vince Lombardi once said, “If you aren't fired

with enthusiasm, you'll be fired with enthusiasm.”

Too many of us are too concerned with wanting people to like us and the decisions we make. That is simply not always possible or even preferable. “Being a great leader means sometimes pissing people off,” Gen. Colin Powell once said.

Mean what you say. As a leader, you must practice what you preach — and apply those standards even-handedly. It also means keeping your promises; and avoiding promises you cannot keep. For example, breaking promises concerning offers to give raises, promotions, or education/training is a no-no. Since actions match words, always honor commitments and promises you make to your workforce.

Integrity. Warren Buffet, chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, said it best: “In looking for people to hire, look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence, and energy. And if they don't have the first one, the other two will kill you.”

A supervisor with integrity has the ability to pull everything together, to make it all happen no matter how challenging the circumstances. As Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf said, “The truth of the matter is that you always know the right thing to do. The hard part is doing it.”

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Without this vital element, supervisors cannot influence those who follow them. Without integrity, you lose trust. And when you've lost trust, respect usually follows suit.

Winston Churchill said, "It is not enough that we do our best; sometimes we must do what is required." Consequently, integrity and bravery go hand in hand. Integrity is needed when deciding what action should be taken. Bravery is also vital, so when faced with changes or modifications that might be disliked by the workforce, don't shrink from those hard decisions.

The character of the supervisor will determine the character of the organization — integrity and bravery are needed to take unpopular actions. Taking a stand, and imposing your own will, can actually enhance the trust between you, the leader, and your workforce.

We are trusted only when others think us worthy of their trust. When it comes to good leaders, almost always the first comments made by others are about honesty and integrity. "You always know where he stands." "She has integrity." "When he says he'll do something, I can take it to the bank."

Teamwork. Bear Bryant, the University of Alabama's famed football coach, used to say members of a winning team need five things.

First, tell me what you expect from me; and second, give me an opportunity to perform. Does the workforce have clear job descriptions? If so, place people in positions or assignments that make the best use of their skills and abilities. Then

provide them with the equipment, resources, technology, and tools to excel.

Third, let me know how I am doing. Caring about individuals in the DC must be "bone-deep, not skin-deep." Most DC workers want and need feedback about the quality of their work. It should happen consistently and regularly. For example, quarterly and annual performance appraisals give the supervisor an opportunity to review an individual's past performance, plan their future work, and define their role within the DC.

Fourth, give me guidance when I need it; and lastly, reward me according to my contribution. In the DC, supervisors must attend to the diversity of the workforce. This means leveraging the talents of all team members regardless of culture, generation, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, or disability through the use of incentives and performance metrics that encourage productive behavior. Always make it a point to allow for effective workers to be rewarded for their efforts and ineffective workers to be disciplined for poor performance.

Teamwork gives your DC a greater sense of identity in its performance. My experience has been that workers feel a collective, contagious pride and personal gratification when they're members of a winning team!

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