



Here is our fall 2007 edition of OMI INFO. The OMI team sincerely hopes that you had a terrific – and motivating – summer. In this edition we look at how to fight a lack of productivity by dispensing dopamine, getting rid of “jerks” and modifying the work setting. You will also have to learn to depend on followers and those approaching retirement.

ARTICLE SUMMARY AND COMMENTARY

Building a healthy and civilized workplace: getting rid of “jerks”

Building the civilized workplace.

The work climate grows out of interactions among individuals: communication, openness to differing opinions, manager/employee relations. These interactions among individuals are built on peoples’ attitudes. Robert Sutton looked at companies that wilfully and openly decided to get rid of any individuals who were harmful to the working environment in their organizations: jerks.

By Robert Sutton, published in *The McKinsey Quarterly*, 2007, Issue No. 2

Who is a jerk? A person who regularly and deliberately stirs negative emotions in others: people feel oppressed in their company or after having dealt with them and feel humiliated and put down.

How to spot a jerk: the 12 horrific examples below are strong indicators; jerks will:

1. Insult people
2. Invade their colleagues personal space
3. Make inappropriate physical contact
4. Threaten others verbally or non-verbally
5. Make sarcastic comments or off-colour jokes
6. Sending scathing e-mails
7. Use their position to humiliate others
8. Publicly reprimand a colleague or subordinate
9. Interrupt others
10. Insinuations
11. Dirty looks
12. Treat people as if they weren't there

An organization that tolerates jerks stands to suffer consequences: internally – employee demotivation – and externally, damage to the company's reputation, customer relations, and its ability to attract the best talent. The fallout from the behaviour of such individuals is substantial: loss of productivity, lower work satisfaction, and sometimes even mental and physical health problems. Why is nothing done when it is clear that such behaviour is disastrous for the organization? Either management is blind and doesn't notice the behaviour or they see it and decide to keep the individuals.

Some companies have adopted the “no-jerk rule” known to all, and do not tolerate certain types of behaviour. A case in point is Southwest Airlines, for whom employee attitudes are a key issue. By issuing a clear directive to employees inside and associates outside the company: no

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behaviour that is harmful to the workplace climate will be tolerated, the company ensures that the interest of employees and the workplace climate is a priority issue and as a result finds it easier to attract talented people.

However, having a “no-jerk” rule doesn’t mean that you have eliminated all potential conflict. On the contrary, the idea is to stimulate the airing of conflicting ideas, the exchange of different viewpoints, but doing it a respectful and interesting manner.

Note from SECOR: we are not looking to instigate a “jerkhunt”! “Jerks” are people who regularly and frequently display the above-mentioned negative attitudes.

Hand out dopamine on a regular basis.

Excerpted from

Gallup Management Journal,

August 9, 2007

The Gallup Groups 12 management principles are well known today, but the authors get a lot of criticism regarding the 7 day cycle referred to in the 4th principle! The fact is their 4th principle states that there must be positive feedback within the **last 7 days**. Apparently this principle is hardly ever adhered to. Why? The answer to that lies not in management theory but in neurology. The brain needs positive reinforcement to release dopamine; however, the effects of dopamine wear off after just a few minutes. That is why you need it often. Unfortunately, the human condition is such that the negative side regains the upper hand much too quickly. The authors remind us that:

- Our psychology drives us to seek compliments more than to pay them,
- Our gene pool is programmed to have us believe to miss seeing something interesting is disappointing, but to miss seeing something serious or unpleasant could be fatal.

That is why we have a natural tendency not to pay compliments and see the negative side of things.

There are a lot of studies on the subject (people vote against rather than for, they lose in order to gain more, we pick up on angry facial expressions rather than happy ones, etc.). Researchers call this a “negative information bias”. In a fast-paced world, the phenomenon is growing.

What this means in everyday life is that if an employee expects some sign of recognition for his work and doesn't get it or if his boss remains silent, the employee's dopamine drop, and this harms productivity. When people don't get their dopamine fix at work, they look for it elsewhere.

A prevalent excuse to not give positive reinforcement is based on the saying that “no news, good news,” but the reality is that the saying simply does not apply to this situation. Others say that they are simply not good at but the authors underline that no leader explains his poor financial results by saying he is not good in math!

We often see these patterns at a company's organizational level after receiving the OMI questionnaire filled out by their staff. It is the notorious “hollow” in the performance management chain. The objectives are quite clear, but the feedback criteria are much less so due to the lack of positive feedback. So people are expecting recognition and not getting any. They quickly come to the conclusion that their company and their manager do not give recognition, but the same thing applies to their colleagues within the organization!

Possible solution: the next time you want to give negative feedback, remember that a hamburger is always better wrapped in a bun! So give positive feedback: express your dissatisfaction with the item that needs improvement and end the discussion on a positive note! The dopamine will stimulate the effort invested in corrective action.



*FOLLOWER
QUALITIES.*

"The boss can't do everything!" That is a phrase that is often heard in organizations. "The CEO spends a lot of time in conferences, luncheons and etc." It's true, leaders can't do everything, They have to delegate work to followers. This reminds us to mention some old principles developed in leader/follower theories.

R.E. Kelley, in a rather old article, said that there had to be efficient followers behind a leader "...when a company has efficient followers, the leader tends to have more of a guidance role in managing change and progress rather than a hero. As organizations adopt structures that are more and more horizontal, the quality of those followers becomes more and more critical." He discerns 4 qualities efficient followers will have:

Interesting Sources: Kelley, R.E., *In Praise of Followers*, Harvard Business Review (oct-nov 1988); Chaleff, I. *The courageous follower, Standing up to and for Our Leaders*, San Francisco, CA, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2002.

- **They can manage their responsibilities quite well on their own**, because they have a lot of confidence in themselves, they agree to follow but know that they are the equal of their leader;
- **They are mobilized around a common higher mission**: they work for the common good of the organization and adhere to common values and principals; if they perceive that their own values are different from those of the leader, they say so or leave the company without sending contradictory messages within the organization,
- **They strengthen their strong points**: they set high performance standards for themselves and are continually learning and updating their skills; they look for responsibilities beyond their comfort zone (question 5 of the OMI is a partial test of that component)
- **They take risks**: they are credible team leaders, are honest and speak their minds; they give credit where it is deserved and admit their mistakes, they keep their teams and superiors clearly informed of what is going on.

The development of a follower's competencies is not easy to do in an organization, which explains why these articles remain current. One of the problems brought up by all the authors is that power is expressed in a parent child relationship rather than a relationship between adults (consenting adults, according to one of our colleagues, Claude Desjardins). Leaders should therefore continue to develop a work climate in which followers feel they have support and are in a position to challenge the leader if need be for the good of the organization.



What to do when it is time to retire?

According to a recent survey done in Canada by Robert Half Management Resources¹, one third of workers plan on not working at all after they retire (N=492).

New survey: a majority of workers plan to delay their retirement date, press release from CNW Telbec

When the time comes to retire, do you think that you will stop working altogether or will you exercise one of the following options:	
Stop working altogether	34%
Change fields and do something completely different	24%
Work as an expert consultant	14%
Work for the same company but a shorter work week	14%
Find a part-time job	2%
Continue working / not planning on retiring	2%
Do volunteer work	1%
Other	3%
Don't know	6%

Paul McDonald, Executive Director of RHMR explains: " The desire of many professionals to keep on foot in the business world at a traditional retirement age could be a blessing for employers who worry about a lack of skilled manpower, a situation that will likely get worse.

The main factors behind these results are: greater life expectancy, increased financial responsibilities and mostly the desire to remain physically and mentally active.

The situation in the U.S. is pretty similar because according to figures published by the American Census Bureau at the beginning of August 2007, nearly one American in four between the ages of 65 and 74 continues working after retirement; a net increase over 2000².

A University of Chicago study shows that most of these workers are "very happy" with their jobs and that their delayed retirement was because they loved their work and was not for financial reasons.

¹ see www.roberthalfmr.com

² One in four retirees continues to work in the united States, *La Presse*, 12/09/2007

KICKERS

Knock out six productivity enemies.

Drawn from
Les Affaires.com,
 August, 28 2007

What is the secret to work productivity? The Institute for Business Technology (IBT) carried out a Canadian study in 2005 of 800 employees. What are these so-called productivity enemies?

1. Talkative anxious or boorish colleagues
2. Meeting mania
3. Habits that get on peoples' nerves
4. E-mails and guess what – the BlackBerry
5. The telephone
6. Micro managing

Some interesting – and disturbing figures:

- 6.3 hours a week invested responding to “do you have a couple of minutes?”
- 6.1 hours a week on average spent on meetings

Good productivity is a positive influence on the working climate, which in turn stimulates mobilization. Eliminating certain irritants and barriers to productivity contributes to the sense of accomplishment. What a concept!

When ergonomics rhymes with performance.

Drawn from *Le confort au travail, une priorité*,
La Presse Affaires,
 10/09/2007

Autres sources pertinentes:

Influence of the physical environment on work performance (productivity).
<http://www.gret.umontreal.ca>

Mission impossible or mission accomplished? Assessment of a universal furniture standard for all workspaces at Desjardins Financial Security.
<http://www.gret.umontreal.ca>

Once we set aside the traditional work stress factors such as workload, management style or tight deadlines, it would seem that managing lesser details related to office comfort are drawing some attention. Re-fitting workspaces, for example, is very trendy right now.

A study by the *Groupe de recherche sur l'environnement de travail* (workplace environment research group) (GRET) of the *Université de Montréal* shows that temperature variations, a lack of windows or noisy cubicles increase unnecessary stress and harm productivity. Noise, in particular, is a significant anxiety factor.

Companies are adopting practices aimed at reducing workplace stress such as banning speakerphone calls, standardizing workstations, etc. Aware that 50% of their employees are moved transferred within the company, Desjardins Financial Security chose to standardize their workstations to reduce the inconveniences that arose when people were reassigned (furniture, office size, etc.) and to fix ventilation, lighting and acoustical problems.

According to the GRET team, this new “functional comfort” at DFS increased employee satisfaction and performance thanks to space saved and reduced moving costs.