

## **Top Five Managerial Dilemmas — And How to Solve Them**

*Submitted by David King*

Whether you're managing your own company or one department within the regional office of an international corporation, there are universal challenges every supervisor faces. These difficulties test the mettle and resourcefulness of even the most seasoned and skilled supervisor.

The following guidelines will help you handle the top five managerial dilemmas swiftly and effectively.

### **#1. Conflicts between employees.**

Individual differences in employees' abilities, temperaments and work styles can frequently lead to tension and problems on the job. When coworkers clash, you face a dual dilemma — you must deal with the immediate issue as well as prevent fall-out that could negatively affect the rest of your staff.

Meet individually with every employee involved and, without assigning blame, restate the situation as you see it. Give each person the chance to give his or her side of the story. Listen as objectively as possible, even if you disagree with certain viewpoints. Then, encourage the parties to collectively brainstorm ways to resolve the problem.

Emphasize that your goal is not to decide who's right and who's wrong, but to help the team work together more harmoniously. Although you should guide the discussion, make sure they understand that it is their responsibility to reach agreement. If the conflict proves to be intractable, you may ultimately have to reassign or transfer one or more of the individuals.

## **#2. Low morale.**

Many factors can cause a decline in morale, including a downsizing or uncertainty about a company's future. When employees are demoralized, they are likely to fall into a self-perpetuating cycle of inefficiency and low productivity. Turnover may increase as staff seek more secure jobs elsewhere. As a manager, you must take decisive action to reverse such trends and bolster spirits.

Meet with your staff and acknowledge that the company has been through a difficult period. Thank them for persevering and continuing to do their best. If you honestly can, reassure them that the situation has stabilized. If this is not the case or if you are not in a position to comment, avoid making promises you won't be able to keep as your staff may be further demoralized by assertions that eventually prove to be untrue.

On an ongoing basis, remember to always recognize and reward good performance. A simple thank-you or public comment about a job well done can help boost lagging morale.

## **#3. Performance problems.**

Most managers have at least one staff member who doesn't perform up to his or her potential. The best strategy for dealing with this dilemma is to hold periodic performance reviews.

Schedule a private meeting with the employee and review recent activity. Start by recognizing instances when the person exceeded expectations and explain why you value this type of behaviour. Then, discuss problematic areas. Together with the individual, establish performance goals and discuss how to monitor progress. Set up another review session as a check-point.

There will be times when no amount of monitoring can reverse weak performance. When you don't see an appreciable change after ample time and numerous efforts to assist the worker, termination may be the best option. An under-performing employee is generally an unhappy one, and this can negatively impact the rest of your staff.

#### **#4. Chronic tardiness/absenteeism.**

Most employees are late or absent from time to time, but if one of your employees comes in late with alarming regularity or has a high frequency of absence, you must take action.

Meet privately and say that you're concerned about the situation. Give him or her a chance to explain the tardiness or absences — a compelling personal reason (family problems or a medical condition, for example) may be the root cause. If that's the case, express your support and discuss ways that the person can still meet his or her job-related responsibilities. If the employee has no reasonable explanation, reiterate the company policy and state that habitual tardiness or absence will not be tolerated. Be prepared to take the necessary disciplinary action if the problem persists.

#### **#5. A top performer hands in her resignation.**

When one of your most talented, valuable employees breaks the news that he or she has decided to accept a position elsewhere, your first instinct may be to make a counter offer or try to persuade him or her to stay. But if an employee is determined to move on, neither of these strategies will have an effect. Although it's difficult to lose a good staff member, you must realize that people's professional and personal goals change over time.

Ask if the employee would be willing to stay on long enough to help train a replacement. At the very least, he or she should tie up as many loose ends as possible and provide you with a final status report on unfinished projects. Conduct an exit interview, being sure to ask what made the employee decide to leave. Pay close attention to the answer in case it points to a situation you have the power to change (for example, the individual felt there were no further opportunities for advancement). Finally, request their new contact information, so that the person remains part of your professional network.

No business is immune from dilemmas that, if not handled wisely and in a timely fashion, could cause decreased productivity, low employee morale and diminished profitability. But by responding strategically, you'll find that such problems arise less frequently and pose little threat to your company's continued stability and success.

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