

Performance Through People: Part 2 of 3 **Why Good Management is About People, Not Things**

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Managing Diversity

In *Dilbert*, the hugely popular comic strip by Scott Adams, his ever put-upon colleague Wally asks Alice, recently promoted and the only female engineer in the department, "How do you like being a manager?" Habitually overworked Alice replies "Do me a big favor. Sneak into my house tonight and smother me with a pillow."

Alice isn't the only manager to feel that way. The reality of achieving management status can often fall into the category of being careful what you wish for. Like the oxymoronic "youth is wasted on the young," in large corporate offices and small businesses alike, managers often are heard to lament that the job would be great if they didn't have to deal with employees.

In the 1982 bestseller *In Search of Excellence*, Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman concluded "Productivity through people, creating in *all* employees the awareness that their best efforts are essential" was one of eight basic principles of America's best-run companies. However, the authors' also sadly concluded that American managers in most companies simply don't take enough interest in their people.

The Challenge of Managing Diversity In and Out of the Workplace

For a manager, building management-employee relationships in today's heterogeneous workforce may seem more challenging than ever. I have found this to be particularly true in the nonprofit world where resources for the mission, both capital and human, are seldom in balance with the passion to achieve the mission. Throw in the idiosyncrasies of managing an unpaid volunteer force, and even the most dedicated nonprofit manager can quickly feel like they are attempting to skate on marbles.

First, diversity is increasing dramatically and the trend is expected to continue. Not only has the employment gender gap dramatically narrowed where the workforce is now almost evenly split, in the 1980's, immigrant populations accounted for one-third of the total population growth.

Between 1990 and 2010, it is projected that in these two decades Latinos will have accounted for 47 percent of the population growth, African-Americans 22 percent and

Asians and other people of color 18 percent while whites will only account for 13 percent of the growth. And these broad categories don't even include a shifting and graying population, changes in family structures, education, and so on.

Employees, partners, and stakeholders, not just technical expertise, are really what effective management is all about. In this era of analysis, rationalization, standardization, efficiency, and quantification, building and managing relationships with diverse employees will likely be the manager's most daunting and critical job. In the end, it is the employees that generate fresh ideas, create value and quality, execute each task, and finish projects on time and under budget.

The critical first step to attaining all the additional value and creativity a diverse workforce brings to the final product is to recognize that many of your employees, constituents, and stakeholders are going to have had very different life experiences than you. So whether you are from Mars or Venus, some identified group, or just unique in your own right, seeking things in common and building bridges with superiors, employees, volunteers, and vendors is fundamental to building successful relationships...and successful businesses.

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