

Management and Performance Associates – January – February 2016 Out with the old, in with the new

“Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything”. George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright

The beginning of the year is a traditional time for change. A new year brings new perspectives to many aspects of our lives. There are new presidents in some countries, and as of January 1st we restart measuring many economic indexes, such as inflation, GDP, etc. Hopes are renewed and plans are made.

Last year, one of our newsletters titled “The road to hell is paved with good intentions,” explored the differences between intentions and a well executed plan. In the spirit of out with the old and in with the new, let’s make a plan. Which bad habits can we leave behind and which healthier ones can we incorporate?

In this article we will explore leadership habits that could be changed. If you already incorporated them or at least some of them, congratulations! Most of these changes aren’t easy.

To keep focus and make our plan more realistic, let’s start with just three recommended habits to incorporate:

Telling vs. Asking

We may be bright and experienced, but so is our team. Nearly a century ago, American president Theodore Roosevelt said “The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint to keep from meddling with them while they do it.”

Innovation and creativity require an environment where ideas are not suppressed. Conversely, team members should be invited to share their ideas. We

don’t need to accept every idea that comes from our team; what we are suggesting is that we explore each idea’s value by forcing ourselves to ask questions in order to fully understand them instead of judging and saying “No, this will never work.”

Compliance vs. Commitment

Don’t confuse “yes, sir” with commitment. If you still believe that ordering your troops to perform a task is the way for a leader to behave, you’d better be working for the armed forces. That’s the only place left that values answers like “sir, yes, sir.” Any other environment requires staff members to be committed. In order to be committed, people need to be engaged, not just told what to do. In the corporate world, compliance is only acceptable – and expected - when we are dealing with policies, legislation or decisions already made at higher levels of the organization.

Directing vs. Coaching

In the leadership classes offered by MAPA Consulting we see participants, many of them senior leaders, make statements like “of course we coach our staff.” When we ask them to rate themselves in their coaching skills, many assess their skills in the top quartile. So, with such an experienced group, we skip the theory and jump to the practical exercises, however there seems to often be a contradiction between their statements and their level of struggle with the actual art of coaching. They limit themselves to telling people what to do. They offer recommendations. Worse, they give them very specific directions in terms of what is acceptable (and what is not). Some dare to even threaten that if performance does not happen (no need to end the phrase).

Few leaders understand that coaching is not what you say, but what you ask. The art of coaching

resides in asking powerful open ended questions that cause reflection and lead to learning. Coaching questions explore the cause before a solution is discussed. Coaching sessions explore alternatives.

Our questions should move the coachee to evaluate each alternative and choose the best one. Of course, it's easier to tell people what to do, but that doesn't generate development. The effect of coaching happens in the coachee's mind.

We are still at the beginning of the year. Which bad habits are we leaving behind? Which healthy ones are we incorporating?

MAPA Consulting can help you and your team to develop these competencies.

See you! Suggestions are welcome.

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