



turning managers into leaders

Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – September 2008

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Merge Gupta-Sunderji turns managers into leaders. Through engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops, she gives people specific and practical tools to achieve leadership and communication success. Contact her at www.mergespeaks.com or 403-605-4756

Are you giving your people butter knives or bread knives?

Recently, I stayed at a fully-equipped resort apartment for a few days. One afternoon, I returned to the apartment for lunch. I pulled out the loaf of freshly-baked bread from the grocery sack, and looked around the kitchen for a bread knife. No bread knife ... in fact, upon further exploration, I discovered that except for the six butter knives in the cutlery drawer, there were no cutting knives anywhere. It must be an oversight by the housekeeping staff, I pondered ... after all, how could a fully-equipped apartment kitchen not have cutting knives of any sort? Imagine my surprise when I was informed by resort staff that their kitchens came equipped only with butter knives. Not one to give up easily, I hunted down the apartment's housekeeper. "No," she confirmed, "no cutting knives, butter knives only." Thirty minutes later, much to my chagrin, I found myself trying to slice a loaf of bread with a butter knife. As you might expect, it didn't go well. In fact, I got increasingly frustrated and irritated as I made unsightly sandwiches with lopsided chunks instead of even slices.

Yes, I know! Despite my aggravation at the time, having to cut bread with a butter knife was not the end of the world. Nevertheless, the incident got me thinking about the critical importance of having the right tools for any job. It occurred to me that as leaders, we often inadvertently put our employees in the same situation. How often have we asked our people to get a job done, but then not given them access to the optimal resources and equipment they need? Later, we are taken aback when they don't produce the results we expect. Truthfully now, have you ever asked an employee to prepare a report, but then let him flounder as he struggled to gather the appropriate data? Have you ever delegated a task to a staff member without establishing her authority to get what she needed from others? If you answered yes (or even perhaps) then that is no different from asking someone to slice bread with a butter knife. Inappropriate tools lead to frustration and irritation for those using them, and invariably lead to failure. Are you guilty of setting your people up to be unsuccessful?

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