



turning managers into leaders

Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – November 2011

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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

Process matters, but don't lose sight of the outcome

I had a baffling experience at my local post office the other day. It's a small satellite office with only two counters available to assist customers, and as I walked up, I noticed that ropes were set up to guide customers in the queue as they waited for the next available agent. Fortunately, there was nobody in line in front of me, so I was able to walk directly up to the only agent that was working that morning. As I placed my envelope on the counter, she looked up and said, "Ma'am, you'll have to go through the line." I thought she was joking as I looked back over both my shoulders, chuckled and said "There isn't anyone in line." Her voice got a little firmer, "Please ma'am, I've been instructed that I cannot wait on you unless you come through the line." A little bewildered, I thought perhaps I was on a revival of the Candid Camera television show. So I retraced my steps back through the short maze, turning right and then left and came to a stop beside the sign that said "Please Wait For The Next Available Agent." Sure enough, once I got there, she looked up at me and said, "Can I help you?"

As I walked out of the store after concluding my business, I didn't know whether to laugh or shake my head in disbelief. My first instinct was to berate the employee – I mean, what happened to common sense? But then I realized that it was more the organization's fault than the employee's. Someone in management had so strongly impressed upon this person the importance of tasks and processes that she completely lost sight of her overriding and ultimate objective which was to serve the customer efficiently and effectively. This is a classic case of following directions blindly even if it gets you to the wrong destination. Unfortunately, by laying too much emphasis on processes and procedures, management has set this employee up to fail. It occurred to me that perhaps similar scenarios occur more often than we might realize. In the pursuit of standardization, could you perhaps have inadvertently created a similar situation where the emphasis is now placed on the process rather than on the outcome?

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