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**Are you giving your people butter knives or bread knives?**

**Merge Gupta-Sunderji, CSP, MBA** - a professional speaker, author, and radio commentator, who turns managers into leaders.

Dear AmCham Members,

Recently, I stayed at a fully-equipped resort apartment for a few days. One afternoon, I returned to the apartment for a quick sandwich at lunch. I pulled out a 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 thought ... 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 apartment 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. True, uneven sandwiches are certainly not the end of the world, but they were a source of aggravation nevertheless!

**"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?"**

This whole incident got me thinking about the critical importance of having the right tools for the job at hand, and the parallels to management scenarios in the workplace. It occurred to me that as leaders, we often inadvertently put our employees in similar situations. 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. When people are not given the tools to get their jobs done, they become disengaged and disenchanting, and we wonder why productivity and performance falters.

Truthfully now, have you ever asked an employee to prepare a report, but then let him flounder as he struggled to gather the appropriate information from restricted sources? Have you ever delegated a task to a staff member without establishing her authority to get what she needed from others? Or have you asked an employee to do several tasks on your computer systems, but it takes a week for him to get a username and password to access the data he needs? If you answered yes (or even perhaps) to even one of these questions, 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? If you want your employees to be engaged, productive and positive, then set your people up for success by giving them the right tools to do their jobs.

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