

Your Personal Style of Leadership

Know what it is and how to maximize its potential

3. The Leader Who Is Motivated By ACCOMPLISHMENT (continued)

Review of the two previous installments:

This third article in the series continues to relate what happened on a Friday at work in the life of foreman Joe, a type of leader whose main motivation is ACCOMPLISHMENT. As you have already learned, in Joe's case the motivation of ACCOMPLISHMENT is overly dominant, causing him to be barely functional at his job. In general, a person can be considered fairly balanced when his main motivation is fairly normal or average. When that is the case, the person is capable of manifesting often the qualities that come with the person's type of motivation. The more dominant the main motivation, the less balanced the person is and the less often he is capable of manifesting those qualities.

Because of his excessively dominant main motivation, ACCOMPLISHMENT, Joe is not very effective in manifesting the leadership qualities of his type, which are: making decisions, taking action, achieving objectives, having a sense of duty and respect for the law, and defending the principles of equity and of civil and legal protection.

You will recall that Joe is extremely upset about a report that the Personnel Department distributed to all employees. The document deals with questions of leadership and Joe feels that the report unfairly challenges his style of leading his team. He feels particularly strongly about the fact that Personnel has sent the document for distribution to all employees rather than addressing it to foremen and managers for their further action.

Joe told his boss Henry that he was not going to distribute the document to his team and that in his team meeting this morning he would instead talk about the team's production for the following week. Henry then asked Joe to come back to his office after the meeting to discuss the matter further, as in his view the distribution of the summary had been agreed upon at the last management meeting and there was obviously a misunderstanding that had to be cleared up. Joe saw it differently but agreed to come back after the meeting and listen to what Henry had to say.

Here's what happens next:

We are now at Joe's Friday morning team meeting. Joe is his usual self. That is, he is all business, reviewing with the participants the production goal that he wants the team to reach by the end of the month, which represents an increase of two percent above the previous month's production, and outlining to them what they have to do to catch up on the diminishing production of the last three weeks. He then asks for comments from the participants – and that's when Joe starts losing his cool.

It should be mentioned again here that lately, Joe had been observing some discontent in his team's behavior, but he is sure that during this meeting, after his calm and factual presentation of the facts and after his precise explanation of the steps to take to reach the planned increase in production, the discontent will disappear and his team will be motivated. But that's not what's happening. Let's return to the meeting.

After making his pitch to the team as planned, Joe asks: "Any comments or questions about the way to reach our production goal next week?"

Walter: "I have a comment. I know you won't like it, Joe, but we all agree that we need to talk to you about it this morning..."

Joe doesn't let Walter finish. Joe had suspected all along that if there was ever any overt grumbling in the team it would be Walter who would voice the complaint. He remembers Walter having occasionally made remarks to him on the floor about the pressure the team was under, and also something about team members wanting to have an input in decisions about production methods and about solving problems. Joe had always managed to ignore Walter, and since no one else had ever complained openly, Joe figures that no one else would this morning, either, as long as he kept Walter in line. Joe is not going to let Walter challenge his ways of doing things -- Personnel has already done enough of that! However, Joe's strategy isn't working, as the following verbal exchange shows.

Joe interjects: "Look Walter, it's not whether I like it or not. What's important is that we all agree on catching up on our lagging production for this month. Do you have any specific comments to make about that?"

Walter: "I want to raise something more general, and I am talking for all of us ..."

Joe cuts Walter off again and says impatiently: "OK, Walter. Let's not beat around the bush! What is it? We have urgent business to settle."

Walter, having come to an agreement about this with his team-mates the day before, goes on the offensive (the first time he did this with Joe): “What’s urgent to you is production, production, production – go, go, go! We can’t hack it any longer. We think there are other ways of doing things and doing them just as well, maybe even better. You push us and treat us like machines – and we are exhausted. I have been trying to tell you before but you keep brushing me off. We know our job and we know there are ways to make improvements. We want a production committee where we can participate in the decision making. We are at the end of our rope – we want a change! I am talking for the entire team.”

Joe is boiling. The gall of this guy! In an effort to neutralize Walter, he turns to Ben, the most quiet of the group: “Ben, are you in on this, too?”

As agreed by the team beforehand, Ben simply raises his right hand, and all the others do the same. No one says a word. Joe is taken aback for a split second, and then he spouts:

“I’m in charge here! You’ll bloody well do as I say. The meeting is over!”

He charges out into the hall, slamming the door behind him, and rushes to Henry’s office.

Through the glass door he sees Henry at his desk and he barges in, shouting: “That’s it! I’ll fire the whole no good bunch! It’s Personnel who started this rotten mess. Why don’t they mind their own, bureaucratic business, those meddling, feeble-minded ...”

Henry interrupts: “Hi, Joe, my man! You are a cheerful sort this morning! It’s a beautiful morning - look outside (pointing to the window), see how nice it is? So take it easy now, my Joe, and let’s talk. Whatever happened, don’t let it take over your life. You are part of my management team and you need to look at problems as opportunities.” Seeing that Joe is still agitated, he adds: “Calm down, my boy, take a seat, and tell me about it.”

Joe never liked being called “my boy” by Henry, or “my man”, “my good man” or other such expressions which made Joe feel that he was being belittled, but Joe had gotten used to Henry’s ways because each time he had gone to see Henry when highly upset, Henry had helped him to regain his composure much more rapidly than when he tried to calm down by himself. Joe also found that talking to Henry helped him to find solutions.

Joe realizes that he needs to collect himself, so he sits down, takes a deep breath, and replies: “Sorry Henry, I shouldn’t have shouted at you like that. But I

couldn't help myself. I just cut short our production meeting and left slamming the door behind me; I have a mutiny on my hands!"

Henry: "Sounds serious, alright. So let me in on what happened, my good man. Take a deep breath and take your time. I am here for you."

As Joe keeps explaining, Henry sizes up the problem in his head: Joe has blown his fuse again! This time he really got into hot water! He is simply too task oriented, too intent on accomplishing his production goals at all costs, and he sees any attention devoted to relationship issues as a waste of time and a cause of ineffectiveness. This makes him impatient, blunt, aggressive, and at times insulting. His style of managing through power, control and strict avoidance of relationship matters prevents him from letting employees participate in decisions. Henry says to himself: 'I need to coach him to reduce his fear of ineffectiveness and to develop better relationship skills. Not an easy task!'

While Joe continues his explanations, the telephone rings. Henry interrupts Joe: "Hold on a second, Joe, this looks like an important call." (Henry considers the call important as the call screen shows that it originates from the conference room where Joe just held his meeting). It's Walter: "Mr. Banks (Henry's last name), this is Walter Rivers. I am sorry to disturb you. We had a production meeting this morning and now we have a crisis. Joe walked out of the meeting and left us sitting here. We all think that we must talk to you. We think it's very important."

Henry: "Of course you do, Walter. I understand, and it is important. As a matter of fact, Joe is here with me right now and we have started discussing the matter. Once I have all the information from Joe, I will want to hear what all of you have to say. Then we'll decide on the next step. Listen, my good Walter, since this is your break time, why don't you and the other boys take the break together and you let them know what I have just told you. After the break, go back to your jobs, all of you, and don't worry. I will be with Joe and I will call you when we're finished."

As Henry hangs up the phone, Joe voices his displeasure at what he just overheard: "Don't tell me you're against me too, Henry! Here I am busting my butt to get things done, and you're pussyfooting with this bunch of whiners and loafers."

Henry walks over to Joe, puts his hand on his shoulder in a fatherly gesture and says: "Now, now, Joe my boy – that kind of talk is not going to get us anywhere. We've got to look at this together calmly. I am going to help you overcome this crisis situation, and after that we will find a way to prevent similar crises from

happening again. I know your great strengths when it comes to getting things done. You are a good man. You are a fast and productive worker. And the position of foreman is not something you have been trained for. It's my responsibility to coach you, and I should have started doing that much earlier. But better late than never, right, my Joe?"

Appreciating Henry's mention of his strengths, Joe finally calms down. With a sudden surge of feelings of doubt about himself, he replies: "I don't even know if I will be able to do things the way you want me to. We were doing so well the first two months and now everything seems to be going to pot. Maybe I don't know how to be a foreman."

Henry, in a reassuring tone: "Come, come now, Joe. As I said, you should have had some training and coaching. Let's catch up on that and you'll see that things will be much better for you. I have confidence in you."

Joe, feeling better: "Well, I am glad that's the way you feel, because I am the way I am, and it doesn't seem to work."

Henry, noting some rigidity in Joe's attitude, responds: "We're all the way we are, and that's part of the problem. We need to work on ourselves. Everybody needs to improve something, and everybody can do so if he wants to. I am sure you don't think you are perfect either, and I am sure you don't think that you are unable to learn, do you?"

Joe: "No. Nobody is perfect and I am not stupid - I think I have proven that."

Henry feels relieved that Joe is responding positively, albeit defensively, and he decides that this is the time to turn to the directive approach, knowing that accomplishment oriented persons need to be given clear-cut, short-term objectives for best results.

Henry says to Joe: "OK. Good, Joe my man. To get things started, I want you to read through the minutes of the last management meeting. Read through them twice and write down what you would do differently if you were at the meeting now. Indicate where you would pay more attention, at what point during the meeting you would intervene, what you would say, and so on. Then come back to see me at my office at 11:30 and we will take it from there. In the meantime I will listen to your team -- not to take sides, mind you - I want you to understand that -- but simply to give them a chance to talk to me as they requested.

I will let you know at 11:30 how I see the situation after having talked to your team. You and I will then decide together on the next step. Remember, this is not

just your problem, it is also mine, because I am responsible for the performance and the training of my foremen. So I need your help, too, my Joe. We need to help each other. I know I can count on you, Joe. Are we agreed?"

Joe is pleased with the way Henry is responding to him. Henry did not talk down at him, kept things down to earth, and expressed interest in Joe's views about what to do next. Joe starts to feel that perhaps there is hope for him as a foreman. He says: "You know me, Henry, you can always count on me. When I say something, I do it, and I do it fast and well."

Henry, again noticing signs of defensiveness in Joe's remarks, replies: "I know you do and I know we can work this out together. But for now I want you to take it easy and enjoy a cup of coffee. Look at this situation as a leader's challenge from which you can learn. Think about how you could approach this differently. Look at the bright side: you are in charge and you can decide to change things. Some day you will learn to have fun doing that, because you can combine the useful with the pleasant. So why don't you just get a coffee and relax in the conference room. There is nothing else going on in there this morning. Take the minutes of the last management meeting with you, so you can read them calmly when you are ready. Read through them twice. And add your comments. We'll meet again here at 11:30."

Joe is relieved and proceeds to get a coffee and review the minutes, while Henry goes to meet with Joe's team.

You, the reader, have a good idea by now about what Joe's excessive task orientation is doing to his relationships. Ask yourself whether and how his leadership behavior can be changed. What about Henry? Can you guess what his main motivation is? What are his leadership strengths? Have you detected any weaknesses in his leadership behavior?

Find the answers in next month's installment. Find out what further leadership initiatives Henry is taking and what the final outcome is. Does Joe get demoted? Or even fired?

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