Make It So!

As you may remember, last March I built a column around one of the tag lines from TV's Project Runway, where at least once during each episode, mentor Tim Gunn exhorts the fledgling fashion designers/competitors to "make it work!" This month, I'm hoping to motivate you toward better overall management of your business by quoting Jean Luc Picard, the captain of the starship Enterprise in Star Trek, The Next Generation, who regularly told his subordinates to "make it so!"

Picard ran a good ship, and part of the key to his management success was to develop good people and then use their talents to the fullest. He didn't micro-manage, and he didn't dominate every decision. In fact, his orders often followed a recommendation from a subordinate, very often solicited by Picard himself.

"Your recommendation, Mr. Worf?" — "Make it so!"

Empowerment

I think we're really talking about three issues here: (1) finding good people, (2) keeping good people, and (3) making life easier on you, the owner. Let's start with the "keeping" issue, and let's recognize that most peoples' level of job satisfaction has something to do with how valued they feel. Happy and productive employees say things like "my boss listens" and "my boss trusts me." Unhappy and unproductive employees say things like "my boss is never satisfied" and "my boss second-guesses everything that I do." The bottom line here is that *empowerment* is a good thing with good people.

So here's a question — two questions actually: Do you listen and do you trust your employees? I'm hoping that the answer to the first question is always *yes*, and guessing that the answer to the second question is sometimes *no*. Having said that, I'm afraid that you don't *always* listen to your employees, and even when you do listen, you don't always *communicate*. That's what happens when both parties listen *and* understand what's been said.

That takes us back to *trust* and *empowerment*. In order to truly empower an employee, you have to trust his or her decision-making abilities. The best way to build that trust is to explain the result you are looking for and then listen to your employee's proposed course of action. The first few cases may require further discussion until you're both on the same page, but the more you communicate in the early stages of empowerment, the more likely it is that you'll approve of—and benefit from!—all the later decisions.

Think of it this way. The second-best case scenario in business is probably to have employees who will do a thorough and conscientious job when you tell them exactly what you want them to do. The best case scenario is to have employees who don't need you to tell them exactly what to do—employees who are truly capable of managing themselves and/or managing others toward the desired results. Not everyone can do that, though, and almost no one can do that without training and accountability.

Training and Accountability

I see a lot of the worst case scenario in my consulting work—employees who don't do a thorough and conscientious job when they're told exactly what to do. I also see a lot of employees who are being managed by osmosis, and that doesn't work! The First Stage of Management is to hire good people, and I'll come back to that in a moment. The Second Stage of Management is to train those good people, and please understand that training means more than just teaching someone how to do an estimate in PrintSmith or how to run a machine. At its highest level, *training* encompasses everything an employee needs to know in order to be a happy and productive part of your organization. If you think that will happen by osmosis, you're really kidding yourself!

The Third Stage of Management is to hold everyone accountable for his/her performance, but that doesn't mean second-guessing every action or decision. What it really means is that every action or decision—especially in the early stages of employment!—is a training opportunity. If you are happy with the action or decision, provide some positive reinforcement. If you are not happy, explain why, and what you'd rather see. Remember these twin foundations of motivational psychology: (1) any behavior which is rewarded will likely be repeated, and (2), any behavior which is tolerated will also likely be repeated.

Think about this, too. In an environment where we have double-digit unemployment, there are very few good reasons for tolerating bad performance or behavior from an employee. Sadly, I see a lot of printing companies where there's a lot more tolerance than management and/or accountability.

Finding Good People

OK, so where do you find good people? The answer is that they're all around. The hard part is separating the good ones from the bad ones, who are also all around.

How do you do that? The answer is to do a better job of interviewing, and then to back up your interviewing process with a substantive testing program. And I'm not talking about Wonderlic here, I'm talking about something that measures attitude, not just aptitude.

I have been using the Caliper Assessment to test salespeople for more than 20 years, and the best word I can use to describe its accuracy is *uncanny*. I have had clients over the years who didn't want to take the time or spend the money to test candidates before hiring. Caliper is not cheap, at $295 per assessment, and it takes most people approximately 2 hours to complete. I have always insisted, though, and in numerous cases where we ultimately hired a candidate we'd tested, I revisited the Caliper report with my client six months later.

"OK, you've watched this person in action for 6 months," I have said. "Now tell me if Caliper accurately described the person you've gotten to know." The response has always been some variation of *uncanny* or *amazing*.

Here's some good news. Caliper has just released a new product called the Predictor, a 30-minute assessment priced at $50, which is targeted at other-than-sales positions like CSR, designer and even production positions. The Predictor provides you with a *position fit index*, using nine distinct Job Families, and I have taken it even one step father by developing printing-industry-specific Job Profiles. If you're interested in learning more about the Predictor, you can find information at www.caliperonline.com, or you can call me at 800-325-9634 or e-mail me at dmf@davefellman.com. I think there's some value in using the profiles I've developed—and in having me help you to interpret the results!

Bottom Line

The bottom line for today is that *management* is the key to success in business, and probably the key to happiness as well. Unless your business is so small that you can do everything yourself, you need others who can "make it so!"