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Managing the Mind-set

By Matt Rawlins ©

Imagine working for years at your job with a clear focus to become a leader in your organization. You do all the hard work, you train and prepare and finally your day comes: you receive a promotion, only to be quickly disappointed with your new position. Now the frustration is because very few people are really prepared for this new expression of leadership.

One of the hardest transitions to make in the workplace is from a hand's on engagement where you do everything yourself, to a leadership position where you now must work through others to get anything done. You must use other's hands to get your job done. As their hands are an extension of their own thinking, you must now work through their thinking to be effective in your own work.

The Art of Inquiry is particularly important when you are required to work through others. There are two key reasons why:

1) The people you are working through will unconsciously screen information before it gets to you. It is estimated that almost 50% of the information is lost or distorted each time it passes through a person. You don't have to be a mathematician to figure out that if the information that defines how you view your business 'world' is coming through 2-3 people, you will be at a severe disadvantage in regards to having the most accurate and critical information at your finger tips. Your view of reality is only as good as the information that people give to you.

What distorts the information that you, as a leader, receive? What can you do about it? Learn to ask more effective questions to make sure you get the information you need. The better the question you ask, the clearer the information you will get.

2) You are not, so to speak, managing the actions of people anymore, but the mindset of those doing the work. You should not be trying to govern each action, this is futile in a changing world. You need to develop the mindset of those you are working through with clear communication. This allows people the flexibility to use multiple actions based on different situations. How they think about the problem or issue is just as important as what they do about it. This requires a major shift in a leaders thinking.

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Samuel Culbert, in his book *Mind-set Management*, defines this as the very heart of leadership. He writes, “Until you know how the other person is inclined to see events and think about them, management and advice-giving are nothing more than power plays and manipulative acts... You can tell people what you think is going on and what they need to do to operate effectively until you are blue in the face, but the only way to know what people are actually inclined to do, and that which they might be inclined to do differently based on your counsel, is to understand their mind-sets before you interact with them...”

One of the most unused capacities of inquiry is the ability it gives you to understand the thinking of the people you are working with. Stephan Covey defined this as, “Seek first to understand than to be understood.” Developing the Art of Inquiry gives you a capacity to understand the mindset of those you are working with and in doing that, you understand the values, passion and purpose of what they do and how they want to do it.

Some questions for those you are working with might be:

How are you thinking about this situation?

What are the values we are operating from to accomplish this?

What challenges do you see in regards to what we need to do?

What are your strengths and who might you need to help you who has different strengths from yours?

When are there key decision points for this project?

What could go wrong and what would be some options for dealing with it?

What are the key things you need to talk with me about and when can you make decisions on your own for this project?

Culbert, Samuel, A. (1996) *Mind-Set Management*, The heart of Leadership, Oxford: Oxford University Press,