

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

On Management



The Second Edition of *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* defines management as "skillful managing; careful, tactful treatment." Seems simple and straight-ahead, right? Not exactly a huge concept to grasp. Why then is "skillful managing; careful, tactful treatment" absolutely foreign to so many managers?

I once worked for woman who was known as the "Dragon Lady," not because she was strong and assertive, but because she was abusive and arrogant with just about everyone she managed. In the management "food chain," I was next in line, so whatever irrational mandate or vile criticism she'd shoot my way, I had to translate into something productive for the rest of the employees.

It was not, to be sure, a seamless working relationship.

Asked one day by a short-time employee (at least he quickly became short-time), why she constantly criticized but never praised, she offered the following: "I'm not here to be your Mommy."

I left that job a number of years ago, but for some reason, her answer to the ill-fated employee that day still bothers me. Why criticism without praise? Because, *I'm not your Mommy*. Following her rationale, then, criticism is an adult management activity, while only children need praise.

Seems we have a slight flaw in logic here, seems like something's a touch out of balance. And it would be nothing more than one woman's unpleasant personality quirk, if the criticism-without-praise "style" of management were not so common. Unfortunately, it's everywhere.

If that particular management style was truly effective, it could be supported through an "ends justify the means" type of argument, assuming you could ignore issues of basic fairness, respect, and courtesy, for those you manage. But it simply doesn't work, particularly in the long-term. An employee verbally whipped into action today will make an extra special effort to slack off the moment you're gone. An employee who goes out of his or her way to surpass expectations, without acknowledgement of that effort by management, won't go the "extra mile" the next time around.

Like criticism, praise doesn't have to be constant. In fact, the more either is applied the less effective each becomes — the expression, "Less is More" certainly applies to both. But one without the other is an unbalanced and ultimately unproductive approach.

The truth is, the "criticism without praise" school of management isn't "tough" or "hard-nosed" or "adult" — it's just lazy. For some reason, call it human nature, it's easier to identify a mistake than it is to recognize good work.

The Dragon Lady used to tell me that people will always find something to be unhappy about in the workplace. She was both right and wrong — and very lazy. What she didn't say (or know) was the best managers can distinguish between simple employee griping and real problems — problems that can often be solved through listening and, now and then, a few kind words.

Matthew Trulio

EVENTS

CALENDAR

APRIL

11-12 48th Annual Southeastern Turfgrass Conference. Spring Hill Country Club, Tifton, GA. Contact: Waldene Barnhill (912) 386-3353 or Brenda Poston (404) 229-8125.

JULY

13-16 International Lawn Garden and Power Equipment Expo. Louisville, KY. Contact: (502) 473-1992.

19-21 3rd Annual Midwest Grounds Management Conference. Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois. Contact: Chuck Scott (309) 438-2032 or fax (309) 438-7955.

SEPTEMBER

18-21 Florida Turfgrass Conference. Ft. Lauderdale, FL. Contact: (407) 898-6721.

OCTOBER

5-6 Southern California Turfgrass Expo. Orange County Fairgrounds, Costa Mesa, CA. Contact: (619) 723-0947.

10-13 Northwest Turf Conference. Seaside, OR. Contact: (206) 754-0825.

NOVEMBER

6-9 International Irrigation Exposition. Atlanta GA. Contact: the Irrigation Association (703) 573-3551.

8-11 New York Turf & Grounds Exposition. Rochester, NY. Contact: (518) 783-1229.

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