



RONKELLEHER
Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders

What I Learned on a Playground that Actually Helped Me as a Leader

Do you remember your grade school report cards? There were grades of “outstanding, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory.” And rather than just subjects there were grades given for social skills and work habits. One of these skills was “works and plays well with others.”

I never thought much about being graded on “social skills” until I started working. Early in my career I realized why it was so important that I know how to “work and play well with others,” this skill forms the basis for all corporate personal interactions! Who would have thought that a skill developed on the playground when I was six would be so important to my career development?

Of course in the business world we do not refer to it as “working and playing well with others.” No, we created a whole field of study called “organizational development.” Organizational development tries to explain how people interact in the work force, and how those behaviors affect corporate profits.

Interestingly, most of our formal education centers around knowledge, not on developing our ability to work and play well with others. While I was graded on this skill in first grade I don’t recall any teaching on the subject. Because of my business focus in college I did get some classes on organizational design and development, but mostly it was finance, marketing, and other such stuff. In my 36-year corporate career I had a couple of seminars on diversity. But that’s about it.

Sad to say, but true, most of our ability to work and play well with others was developed on the playground when we were six or seven. Fortunately, the Bible provides a wealth of information on the subject. It provides guidelines for personal behavior, our interactions with others, and importantly, has a lot to say about employer - employee relationships.



The Bible focuses on two central themes; our relationship with God, and our relationship with one another. Both of these themes are established in the first chapters of Genesis.

God created a relationship with man when he formed Adam from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). But God never intended for Adam to just sit around, so right after God breathed life into Adam He placed him in the Garden of Eden, *“to work it and care for it”* (Gen. 2:15). Thus the relationship between man and God was created and the first “work” was assigned to Adam. Soon afterwards God created Eve because, *“It is not good for the man to be alone”* (Gen. 2:18) and with this the first relationship between mankind was created.

Understanding these themes provides guidelines for developing strong, Biblically based, working relationships with our bosses, peers, and employees.

Typical World View of Organizational Behavior

Frederick Taylor rose from factory worker to senior executive in the late 1800’s. Taylor developed the concept known as Scientific Management in an effort to reduce waste and inefficiency in the factory. Taylor viewed the workforce as labor; a means to an end. Using his theory leaders broke jobs down into basic activities. They analyzed each activity trying to make them more efficient. They would then decide how long each activity should take and create work standards aimed at maintaining output levels. Creation of these work processes effectively eliminated creativity from the work force. Leaders in this environment were responsible for maintaining the output, not for employee turnover rates or job satisfaction.

Some forty years later in 1924 General Electric hired Elton Mayo to research employee motivation. Surprise! Mayo discovered that workers were motivated by a number of material as well as social and psychological factors.

From Mayo’s initial research with General Electric, Abraham Maslow created his well-known Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Maslow posited that workers were motivated by a set hierarchy of material, social, and psychological needs; food and shelter, safety and security, belonging and affection, esteem and self-respect, and self-fulfillment.

Realizing that not all workers were concerned with each of these in the same order Frederick Herzberg created a somewhat more flexible model of worker needs and their relation to motivation. Maslow and Herzberg’s work is now known as the Human Relations Approach.

The difference between the two approaches is dramatic; in the Scientific Management Theory you fit the worker to the production line, whereas with the Human Relations approach you fit the production process to the worker. Both of these approaches are designed to enhance corporate bottom lines. This is as it should be; without corporate profits there are no jobs. However, both



of these and other approaches to organizational behavior can be enhanced with some basic Biblical principles.

Biblical Principles of Organizational Behavior

Dr. John Haggai wrote a chapter in the book *Biblical Principles and Business - The Practice* in which he identifies five elements of Biblical doctrine to guide our behavior in the organization.

Every individual is of value to God. God made us in his image (Gen. 1:26-28), and He cares about every detail of our lives. Jesus told the disciples *“And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered”* (Matt. 10:30). If God cares how many hairs are left on my head certainly he cares about the really important things.

Justice must be done. The law of the Old Testament was provided so that we would know that we cannot be perfect in keeping the law. In Isaiah God says, *“I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line...”* (Isa. 28:17). God calls us to a very high standard of integrity that includes our personal, social, and corporate responsibilities.

Work is to be kept within limits. The Bible assigns a very specific place for work in our lives. God says to Adam, *“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food”* (Gen. 3:19). Over a dozen Proverbs warn us not to get lazy, *“A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing”* (Prov. 20:4). Paul writes, *“For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.” We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat”* (II Thess. 3:10-12).

The wise prophet, Solomon, understood that no matter what we accomplished through our work it meant nothing without our relationship with God, *“So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind”* (Eccl. 2:17).

Man’s first duty to his neighbor is one of love. A Pharisee asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment. Jesus answered, *“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”* (Matt 22:37-39). Who is our neighbor? As Luke defined neighbor it is anyone who needs our help (Luke 10:25-37).

Successful enterprise demands a shared vision. A lot has been written about the importance of vision lately. The book of Proverbs links vision to discipline, *“Where there is no vision the people are unrestrained, but happy is he that keeps the law”* (Prov. 29:18 NAS).



Dr. Haggai writes, “The entire history of Israel in the Old Testament is, from one perspective, an object lesson in the failure to achieve a common vision. And the principle contained in that story is as valid for a partnership of two people as it is for an entire nation.”

Morale and Behavior

For all of the theory surrounding organizational behavior there is one truth; when morale is high, production increases, when morale is low production decreases.

Morale exists for the individual and for the group. Each employee’s morale affects their own productivity, and taken together there is also a dynamic of group morale. A group’s high or low morale can impact the morale of an individual, just as the morale of an individual can impact the morale of a group. In practice, the morale of the group will most often influence the morale of the individual, not the other way around.

An employee’s behavior is a reflection of their morale. So how can you, as a leader, develop and maintain high morale in your organization? There are no guarantees but the following seven behaviors will help build employee morale.

- 1) Understand people’s needs.** Leaders must understand the needs of their people and the group. This kind of information can only come from spending time with your people – away from the work place.
- 2) Listen carefully and often.** You cannot possibly understand your employees if you don’t listen to them. Much of employee’s dissatisfaction with the work place disappears if they have a boss who will really listen to their issues.
- 3) Create fair policies.** In recent years we have created many policies and programs to help certain classes of employees. This can backfire because whenever you include one class, you exclude another. Jesus told the disciples to tell the world about the truth, not just a select few.
- 4) Accept responsibility.** Adam and Eve sinned and then they started blaming others; Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. No leader can build morale by blaming others, either up the chain of command or down.
- 5) Avoid manipulating people.** People are not puppets. They can spot manipulative leaders from a mile away. Good leaders lead, they don’t manipulate. Jesus gave people the truth and let the truth change them. He never tried to get people to do things by tricking them.
- 6) Be compassionate.** You won’t always agree with your employees, but you should always be sensitive to their needs. No leader can win the undying loyalty of employees without sincerely caring about them as individuals.



7) Discipline fairly and quickly. Jesus hated sin but not the sinner. As leaders, our discipline should focus on the behavior, not the individual. Also, don't let something go and then blast the employee six months later in a performance review – they'll never trust you again.

Getting Started

The military describes high group morale as esprit de corps; “the common spirit existing in the members of a group and inspiring enthusiasm, devotion, and a strong regard for the honor of the group.” Developing high group morale, or esprit de corps, is not an easy task. Here are eight steps you can take from Dr. Alan McGinnis' book *Bringing Out The Best In People*.

1) Place a premium on collaboration.

There's a saying, “Two minds are better than one.” Encourage people to work together rather than separately. Reward those who succeed through collaborative efforts.

2) The need to belong.

Employees want to belong. They want to feel needed, appreciated, and accepted by the group. Make it easy for people to gain acceptance in your group.

3) Quality Control.

Peer pressure can be a wonderful thing for a leader. Peers will often hold each other to higher standards than the boss will. Don't assume responsibility for quality control on every little thing, it is far better for the group to hold its own members accountable for high performance.

4) All for one and one for all.

Remember the call of the Musketeers? It was “*All for one and one for all!*” Leaders should be in it with the troops and every member of the group should understand that their performance is a reflection on the group. Army generals Patton and MacArthur, despite their shortcomings, earned the undying loyalty of their troops because they were devoted to the welfare of their men.

5) Promises.

Nothing destroys morale as fast as the broken promises of a leader. Don't make promises you cannot keep, and be honest with employees on the day that you have to explain why the raises you promised won't be forthcoming after all. A reputation for integrity can take a lifetime to make, and only seconds to lose so guard this characteristic with all your might.



6) Fairness.

Believe it or not there are bosses who structure contests so that their favorite employees will win. They think no one sees through them. What fools! As a leader your first job is to create a well defined set of work principles and expectations that you can enforce with complete fairness across your organization.

7) The preservation of the individual.

While employees want to be members of a group they don't want to lose their own identities. Make sure people are valued for their unique skills and specific contributions to the group.

8) Fun.

All work and no play means increased employee turnover. While business is serious and the stakes are often high, make sure that work includes some humor.

One Final Thought

A group whose morale is high is stronger and more productive than any single individual. They can create more and do more, at lower cost than individuals who are serving their own self-interests.

The writer of Ecclesiastes provides a wonderful view of the strength of a group; *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken”* (Eccl. 4:9-12).

The key to strength in numbers is unity of mind and purpose. But the key to morale is job satisfaction and satisfaction from our work comes from a focus on God. He meant us to work and gave us skills to make us successful. But success, no matter how you define it, is hollow outside of a personal relationship with Jesus. If you don't think so look at the entertainment stars who have everything money can buy but search madly for meaning in life. They search with drugs, alcohol, and special causes but as Solomon said, these are all meaningless without God.



Words to Ponder

- I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. (Ps. 32:8)
- The heart of a fool is in his mouth, but the mouth of the wise man is in his heart. Benjamin Franklin
- God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (Ps. 46:1)
- Two things are bad for the heart – running up stairs and running down people. Bernard Baruch
- Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Prov. 3:5-6)
- Light is the task where many share the load. Homer
- A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Prov. 15:1)
- The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. (Prov. 15:2)
- The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. (Eccl. 7:8)



Cases in Real Life

Background

The organization is a large multinational company with dozens of dissimilar products manufactured at plants throughout the United States. About half of the products were developed in-house and about half through acquisition.

The plants are responsible for manufacturing to a target delivered cost. This delivered cost is measured in total for the plant and by brand, not by item.

The corporate leaders rely on the plant meeting their projected delivered costs because this directly impacts their profit forecasts. Corporate however, looks at delivered cost by item, not just by brand, or in total for the plant.

Situation

Dan is in his 30's, been employed with the company in a variety of roles (none manufacturing) for ten years. He has been assigned to be the liaison between plants and corporate (a new position). During the first weeks in his assignment here is what Dan found:

The plant's perspective of corporate is that corporate only wants to beat them up about the numbers. They feel that corporate really doesn't care about the difficulties and issues the plants face in meeting the delivered cost targets. The result is that they only give out information when asked, and then reluctantly.

Plants get along pretty well with each other because they don't compete in the manufacture of the same items.

Corporate says the plants only want to do their own thing. The plants don't seem to understand that they are part of a larger system.

This situation between plants and corporate has existed for years with little change. Due to increased cost cutting pressures relationships have recently deteriorated even more.

Solution

Just what any general leader needs is bickering and in-fighting between such large divisions of the organization! One group barely talks to the other group because they are suspicious of each other. They all get "unsatisfactory" on "works and plays well with others".

The key to solving this and many other problems between groups of individuals is to open lines of communication.



Dan starts out by developing a thorough assessment of the situation. He sets up separate meetings with corporate people and plant people to find out how they feel about each other. He asks questions like; “What do you think their objectives are?”, “How are they rated?”, “How do you feel about them?”, “How do you think they feel about you?”.

Once the fact-finding meetings have been completed, Dan brings the plant people and corporate people into a joint meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to fix the communication problem and get them working with each other productively.

Dan opens this meeting with a discussion of the total system that develops, tests, manufactures, and markets products. Within this discussion he focuses on the manufacturing and corporate interfaces. Then representatives of each group give a presentation on the elements of the system for which they are responsible. They discuss how they are rated, how their objectives are established, and what the objectives are.

Dan understands that business gets done when it is mutually beneficial so he is looking for a common denominator in these presentations that can be used to bring the parties together.

The common denominator turns out to be the delivered cost number. The plant has to achieve it for the corporate people to be able to meet their profit forecast. Neither group can get good ratings without controlling this number.

Dan has the combined group develop a plan to achieve the required delivered costs in total and by brand. People from corporate and manufacturing are assigned ownership of different parts of the plan, and a timeline for completion of each aspect of the plan is created.

Dan’s next steps are to make sure that there is a reporting system that will follow the groups’ progress, and to follow-up regularly with people to make sure that the plan is working, they have the resources they need, and that everything is on track.



Meeting Notes

Use these meeting notes as a guide to building morale and developing better working relationships among bosses, peers and employees in your work place.

1) Conduct a survey to determine where you stand today. Ask employees to rate (on a scale of one to five) their bosses on the following:

Does your boss understand your needs as an employee?

Does your boss listen to you when you try to share work place concerns?

Does your boss administer policies fairly?

Does your boss accept responsibility for his/her mistakes?

Does your boss get things by manipulating people?

Is your boss compassionate?

Does your boss provide prompt discipline and correction?

2) Summarize the results of the survey without breaking down the responses by individual and share with the group.

3) Lead a group discussion of good and poor examples of each of these questions. Make no judgments of right or wrong – just lead the discussion.

4) Ask the group for recommendations for improvement areas. Focus on specific things that can be done corporately. Do not allow the discussion to degenerate into “he said, she did”. Keep it broad enough for the entire organization to benefit.

5) Empower the group to be change agents for behaviors that detract from group performance.

6) Follow-up in six months to see how the organization is doing.



Building Esprit de Corps

Every individual is important to God. God made us. God gave each of us unique skills to be used in the work place. Leaders should not only recognize these unique differences but find ways to capitalize on them.

- ☑ **Fairness is not an option.** Three times in the Old Testament business people are reminded to use honest scales. There is no substitute for honesty, fairness, and justice in the workplace. No team can exist without it.
- ☑ **Work should be fun.** While God commands us to work we also need to understand that nothing we do in business will have eternal implications; no building will stand forever, all steel will rust away, and all cloth is consumed by the moth. Don't take yourself so seriously that you fail to have some fun along the way.
- ☑ **Help each other.** We are commanded to love our neighbors, and anyone who needs our help is our neighbor.
- ☑ **Share your vision.** Without a corporate goal employees cannot possibly have a team focus. Share and gain commitment to the corporate vision.
- ☑ **Be an encourager.** Learn to listen to your employees, care about them and their work.
- ☑ **Keep your promises.** Don't make promises you can't keep, and keep the ones you make.
- ☑ **Reward collaboration.** Encourage people who work together to achieve greater goals.
- ☑ **Achieve balance.** Work must be balanced with our other responsibilities. We have homes, families, and most importantly a relationship with God.