

When It's Time for a CHANGE...

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ONE of the most difficult problems a supervisor has to face these days is overcoming resistance to change. This problem is becoming more and more serious because of our rapidly changing technology and increasing know-how. As new ideas and methods appear, supervisors are finding themselves faced with the problem of helping people to accept the resulting changes.

What are some of the barriers people place in our way as we attempt

to introduce change? We may encounter considerable aggression on the part of the individuals who are subject to the change; they may openly attack us as we try to introduce the change or become hostile in other ways. We may find that the amount of sloppy or careless work increases; we may find a disinterest on the part of individuals to do that which they are called upon to do; grievances may increase in number. Where a union is present, we may be

faced with numerous slowdowns or even strikes. A few studies have indicated that absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover are very definitely methods used by people to deal with a change.

There is one type of barrier that has probably been studied in this context more than any of the others—the restriction of output. Often, great care is exercised in timing operations, setting standards, and otherwise working out the details of a wage-incentive system; and yet at least part of the work group forms into what sociologists call an informal group, under a leader of its own choice. This group decides what a fair day's work is and develops methods of keeping the nonconformer in line. The individual who starts to respond to the incentive is held in check by sanctions which the informal group is able to bring to bear against him. This restriction-of-output device has also been used in dealing with other types of change that management has tried to introduce.

Why this kind of behavior? Why do individuals set up these barriers in our way, making it difficult for us to do the kind of job we think is important in terms of the organizational objectives of the company? In order to get some insight into behavior of this kind, we must first try to understand the needs of the individuals who are actually establishing these barriers. People's behavior results

from their efforts to satisfy needs that are important to them. These needs lead them to behave in a way that will help them attain what we might call personal goals. Personal goals are those which an individual feels will satisfy his needs.

Conflicting goals

The organizational goal, on the other hand, is the thing the supervisor is trying to accomplish by getting the members of his work group to behave in certain ways. It often happens, however, that the personal goal of the individual is not the same as the organizational goal—or they do not appear to have anything in common.

In this kind of situation, people tend to become disinterested in the work. All that is important to them is attaining the personal goals that will satisfy their needs. This helps explain why very often workers seem to do the minimum they have to do to get by, and you start asking yourself, as every generation has, "What is happening to people nowadays? Why are they so lazy? They don't seem to care any more. Their standards are going to pot." This is all quite understandable if a person is interested only in attaining a personal goal. He quickly tries to figure out the minimum he has to do to attain that goal, to get that pay check or whatever else is important to him; and he does not have any real interest in attaining the organizational goal.

New ideas and methods almost al-

ways, at the outset, represent a threat to the security of the individuals involved in the change. The individual asks himself, "What does this mean to me? How is it going to affect me?" And this is what is really important in determining his behavior. He starts to wonder, "Have I been doing a poor job? Is the power or prestige which I now have going to be here after the change has been introduced? What about the skill which I have spent years developing—is it going to become obsolete?"

The individual is concerned that the change may either make it impossible for him in the future to satisfy certain of his needs or to satisfy them as fully as he has been able to in the past. And when an individual becomes threatened, he develops modes of behavior (the barriers) to deal with the threat.

There are also certain group influences to consider. We have to recognize that the behavior of an individual is affected by the group; no individual functions in social isolation. And very often changes have a very important impact on established ways of doing things within a group—on established norms or values. When this is true, the group reinforces the individual's feelings of insecurity and adds to the problems we face in introducing change.

Overcoming the barriers

Using this as the basis to explain why people behave in the way they do, how do we deal with these barriers? How do we overcome them in order to gain acceptance of new

ideas and methods and processes?

At the outset I should like to suggest one generalization. Of very great importance is the human atmosphere that exists between the person trying to introduce the change and the individuals who are subject to the change. If mutual confidence is not present, if people distrust one another, the strength of the barriers will be greatly increased. When a person has a real sense of trust and confidence in another person, he is much more likely to go along with what the other person is trying to do.

For people to accept new ideas or methods, probably three different things have to occur. *First, it is important that people understand the reasons for the change.* They have to get some insight into why a change is going to be made. Very often, supervisors will simply announce the change and say, "Here it is, boys; from now on we behave in this way." There is no explanation, no indication to the people involved as to why the change has to be made. Understanding of the need for the change is important if people are not to set up barriers.

Second, people have to see that the change is going to be good for them. This point relates back to the question, "What does this mean to me?" If it is not going to involve something better for the individual—or at least something as good—he is apt to resist the change. He is going to want assurance that there will not be any reductions in need satisfaction, and that the change will at least leave him no worse off than he is right now, or;

even better, that it may improve his present situation.

Finally, after the individual understands the reasons for the change and has seen what the change is going to mean to him, then generally *some new behavior will be called for on the part of the individual*. He may have to learn some new skills; he may have to develop some new attitudes; he may even have to change his whole frame of reference in order to deal with the new situation.

Three possible approaches

What are some of the methods you might use in bringing about change—methods that might at least minimize the strength of the barriers? One approach which is very often used involves selling. After you have worked out your plans, you try to sell them. Sometimes, perhaps, you go a bit further, and after you have gone through your sales pitch, you give the boys a chance to ask some questions. You try to answer these as frankly as you can. I would like to suggest that while the sales method does have certain advantages, it has many strong disadvantages. The selling approach is aimed at the intellectual level. You are telling someone else what the answers are. The other person is most often a passive listener—a person who is asked to accept that which you are trying to put over on him. Considerable research evidence indicates that even though you may be successful in reaching an individual at the so-called intellectual level, the likelihood is great that you will not have very much impact on

the way that he actually behaves.

A second approach which might be used—a better one, in my judgment—is this: You, as a supervisor, formulate the new idea or develop the new method before approaching the employees. But you recognize that your first formulation of the idea or method is a preliminary one. You make it clear that it is subject to modification after consultation with the employees or with the union which represents them.

Now, it really takes a big person—big in terms of his total personality—to use this approach. When a person gets into a line position, he often has a feeling that he is supposed to have all the answers, that he is lowering himself in the eyes of others even to suggest that maybe they may be able to offer something that will improve his idea. There are a lot of people who are small in this respect, who find it difficult actually to consult those who are involved in the day-to-day operation—the people who, after all, ultimately determine the success or failure of the change. A person who is big enough to use consultation, to recognize that the people on the firing line very often have much to offer, is much less likely to be faced with barriers than is the “salesman.”

The third approach involves even more participation on the part of the people subject to the change. It involves what we might call group decision. It recognizes that if the new idea or method is really going to be accepted, it had better be worked out by the people who are going to

have to live with it. It recognizes that if people who are threatened by a change have an opportunity actually to work through from the beginning on the new idea and to assure themselves that their needs will be satisfied in the future, they will then recognize the change as something of their own making and will give it their support.

If you think this is ivory-tower theorizing, let me bring to your attention a very interesting research study that was conducted a few years ago in a sewing plant of the Harwood Manufacturing Corporation, in Virginia. The experiment was set up to try to measure the relative effectiveness of different methods of introducing change. Four groups were selected, which were matched in the important respects. The first group, called a control group, had the change introduced to it in a way which had been customary in the Harwood Corporation. This was the selling approach, with an opportunity for the individuals involved to ask questions.

The first experimental group used participation by representation. A few representatives were chosen from the group, and these individuals participated in designing the changes to be made in the job and in setting the new piece rate. After this participation, the representatives went back to the group, told them what had taken place, and helped train the other members in the new method of performing the work.

The second and third experimental groups used total participation. Here, every member of each of the groups

participated in designing the changes, in setting the piece rate, and in learning the new method of work.

What were the results? Prior to the change, all four groups were producing around 60 units per hour under an incentive system where a unit was defined as one minute of standard work. After the change, the control group's production fell down to somewhat below 50 units, climbed up thereafter to 50, and maintained the level of 50 units per hour for the balance of the experiment, which was approximately 30 days. Interviews conducted with members of the control group during the experiment clearly indicated that restriction of output was taking place and that 50 was now looked upon by the group as the new standard. Antagonism toward management was marked, and there were 17 per cent quits during the experiment.

In the first experimental group—the one that participated through representation—production fell to about the level of 40 units, but it quickly rose until, about the fourteenth day, it passed 60, and continued on up to about 65 units. The two other experimental groups—the ones under total participation—fell down in production on the first day but immediately recouped to the level of 60 and thereafter continued to show an increase, reaching a level approximately 14 per cent higher than their production before the change. Not only did production increase for these two groups, but there was also definite evidence of less aggression toward management and there was,

no turnover among those people.

Overcoming resistance to change, like handling many other on-the-job problems, involves the supervisor in

trying to understand the people with whom he works and in dealing with them as human beings whose feelings and attitudes deserve respect. ♦

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