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03/24/2021

BUS 161 OL B Assignment 5:

Whether as routine as waking up on-time or as lofty as colonizing another planet, the road to accomplishment begins where goals are established. Though whatever the grandeur, the road to said accomplishment is a near infinite abstracted chain of smaller, seemingly insignificant goals and accomplishments. For instance, for a person to realize their goal of waking up on-time, they may first establish a goal to go to sleep earlier. To do that, they may establish the goal of being in bed by a certain time, and so on. Likewise, if Elon Musk, founder of privatized space-flight company SpaceX, has a goal “*to send a first wave of 100,000 people to Mars in about 10 years in 1,000 spaceships*”, well, it is going to require a lot more steps than going to bed on-time, but none more invaluable than having employees that accomplish their own, less abstract goals. No matter the grandeur, however, if the smaller goals are not achieved, then it puts the accomplishment of the primary goal, and at times, the company at risk. However, being that goals are conceptual, they will always vary in terms of attainability, and as a result, will not always be met. This is what makes the process of managing and disciplining an employee who fails to meet a goal so important in the success of a company.

In the unfortunate event that an employee falls short of their goal, discipline may be the best course of action. However, before making the decision to engage in disciplinary action, a manager should think critically and analyze the entire situation including: their communication with the employee, the goal itself, the mission of the company and of course, the employee’s performance and motivation.

The first thing for a manager to consider prior to discipline should always be the level of communication with an employee. If the goal has not been properly communicated to them, they should not be held accountable for missing it. Likewise, if an employee is struggling, communication should take place about why that is. Sometimes, an employee may not even realize that they are not meeting expectations or may not understand how to improve their performance. To mitigate miscommunication relating to employee expectations, many companies implement S.M.A.R.T. goals. *“The best goals are Specific, Measurable, Agreed Upon, Realistic, and Time Bound”, which allows both the manager and employee to “understand clearly what the goals are, how they are to be achieved, and a timeline.”*

If communication has been sufficient between a manager and their employee, then the goal itself may need to be examined. While proper communication ensures that the goal is understood, sometimes the “R” in S.M.A.R.T. goals demand a closer look. If a goal is not realistic, the only thing that discipline can ensure is a loss of employee morale and motivation. One way of determining the reality of a goal’s attainability is through the comparison of the employee’s performance to their peers. If they are not alone in falling short of their goals, it may be time to adjust the goal. Many things can also occur that make goals unrealistic, such as “lost or new customers, higher than expected employee turnover, etc. We all know change is constant in our companies, and the smart leader is the one that learns to adjust.” A manager that maintains flexibility and understands that certain situations can render a goal unrealistic, also knows that disciplining employees during these times will likely lower an employee’s productivity rather than increase it.

While on paper communication and attainability of a goal are the most important factors in determining whether an employee should be disciplined or not, I do think that it is important to consider the mission of the company, and an employee’s historical performance, and their level of motivation before making a final decision.

If an employee is not necessarily excelling in hitting their goals but contributes in other ways that move the company closer to achieving its mission, then perhaps a reassignment would be a better alternative to discipline.

Additionally, if an employee has historically performed well but has fallen short of their most recent goal, then it may be best to gauge an employee’s motivation and how to catalyze it. There are also times when an employee is motivated, giving it their all, and still not performing at the level that they have in the past. Though somewhat counterintuitive, they may be overworking themselves trying to reach the level of performance that they know they are capable of and genuinely just need a break – in this scenario, discipline may negatively reinforce their efforts, and as a result break their ambition.

Finally, an employee who may be falling short of their goals due to a lack of motivation – or rather be in an environment that curbs their motivation. If that is the case a manager may have more to gain by determining what the employee’s motivators are and implement a strategy that corresponds with them. For instance, many highly capable employees underperform due to a lack of autonomy or by having goals that are not challenging. For them, discipline may make further lower their motivation because it may make them feel as though they are working in an autocratic workplace. While the goal of discipline is to increase their level of performance, this may be best achieved by merely letting them internalize the lack of performance that they are undoubtedly aware of, and ultimately come up with their own solution to that problem. By letting them take ownership of their performance, it may motivate them to perform at a higher-level because they ***want*** to, rather than because they ***have***to.

In conclusion, discipline, and the decisions of how and when to implement it into a management strategy should be as dynamic as the employees involved, while keeping the mission of the company in mind. There is not a “one size fits all” answer to these questions and is the reason that managers who possess the skills and abilities to think critically about and decide how to effectively manage their employees incredibly valuable to the companies that employ them. Most employees – or people for that matter – want to perform at a high level, and the most valuable managers are the ones that find the way to convert that ambition into value for their company at the highest rate.

References

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