

# AIMING FOR Success

## IN SURVEYING MANAGEMENT—#2

—by Richard A. Smith, P. E.



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In my first column regarding surveying management success, appearing in *ACSM Bulletin #227*, I emphasized the importance of helping others in your company because "the more you help others, the more you do to help yourself and your engineering firm." The focus of that column was on the importance of consensus thinking. Here I want to emphasize a second success tactic which reflects that same philosophy of helping others to help all—take steps to include as many employees as possible in the company's decision-making process. Make this a part of your management style. Make a personal commitment to help create decision makers—the more, the better. There is probably no better way to build a team of dedicated achievers than to make every employee a part of the company's decision-making process and strengthen every employee's decision-making capabilities.

Decision-making has a positive ripple effect with far reaching consequences. Increasing the number of employees who feel that they have the authority and the encouragement of management to make decisions will impact employee performance as well as company accomplishments. It is a win-win situation. Employees making decisions are impacted in several ways, and I will come to this shortly. The company certainly benefits when more employees consider themselves decision makers.

A friend once told me about a company executive being roasted on the tenth anniversary of his employment. One of those involved in the roast quipped: "Charlie has a number of favorite statements he likes to use. The one I like best is when he says, 'you know, I have an idea of how this should be done but I like your idea better.'" An uproarious response ensued because Charlie was not known to ever admit that somebody else's idea was better than his. So, rather than being an example of ribaldry, the executive's approach to decision-making consistently weakened the motivation of his company's employees because he always thought his ideas were better.

That, certainly, is not the way to enhance the company's achievements. You want to encourage others to suggest ideas and make decisions to put those ideas into action. You want to foster the art of decision-making in as many employees as possible because decision-making can have an enormous ripple effect, such as:

- **Building confidence.** When employees make decisions, they discover their strengths and become more confident, and, as a result, they not only do a better job of acting on their own decisions, but also

take positive actions that will support the decision of others. Self-confidence, of course, is a crucial management strength. A by-product of creating a high level of self-confidence throughout the firm is an increased sense of teamwork.

- **Helping employees feel important.** As employees become more confident and more aware of their decision-making authority, they will begin to feel more important to the company. In most circumstances, there is a direct correlation between an employee's feeling of importance within the company and that employee's decision-making experience and authority.
- **Giving employees a greater sense of ownership.** The more employees are relied upon for their decision-making capabilities, the closer the employees will feel to the company's mission and accomplishments. They will have a much greater sense of ownership in terms of how effectively the company moves forward.
- **Strengthening employees' focus on strategies.** As employees realize that they are trusted to make key decisions, they will focus more on the company's strategies and values and feel more responsible for implementing them. Thus, the more decision-making you delegate, the stronger your organization becomes.
- **Furthering company momentum—moving things forward faster.** You will be surprised at the added momentum you will create within your firm when there are more people involved in the decision-making process. Decision makers are generally more proactive; they are interested in moving forward; they are willing to make change when necessary; and, consequently, they are more attuned to discovering opportunities and turning them to their company's advantage. Status quo is not an option for decision makers.
- **Decision-making encourages "I care" attitudes.** By broadening the company's decision-making process, you will lift the spirit of your organization, infuse it with more positive attitudes, and get more employees to care about the company's present and future.
- **Employees feel connected—they are part of the inner circle.** Every employee should feel so important that they see themselves as part of top management's "inner circle." That can be achieved when employees know that they have the authority to make decisions that are as important as those made by top management.
- **Sharpening the skill of critical thinking.** Engineering people, to a large degree, are born critical thinkers. And when employees know they are important decision makers, the standard of critical thinking in a company will go up. With sharper critical thinking skills, decision-makers tend to be better at analyzing and interpreting, they are more inquisitive, and not satisfied with simple or immediate answers.

These are some of the ripples delegating decision making within a company can make. They are all positive and will bring added strength and commitment to a company.



Your willingness to encourage the delegation of decision-making to all employee levels indicates to employees that you trust them and that you want their involvement in company matters. It also shows how highly you value your employees for their decision making skills. And they should continually be motivated to become better managers—at meetings, company events, and in conversation with employees—and encouraged to read on the subject and think through their personal decision-making processes.

A big part of effective decision-making is access to information. Employees need to be kept informed regarding company matters so they can make informed decisions. Often, with information come challenges which then can ignite creative and opportunistic thinking among employees and foster better decision-making and more competitive performance.

Another big part is recognition. Performance reviews should include opportunities to discuss an employee's decision-making performance and look at ways to improve that performance. Productive employees need the chance to grow. Sometimes that need for growth may involve diversifying their work and increasing their decision-making responsibilities.

The key to furthering decision-making in a company is an ability to make each and every employee feel valued as an individual. Acknowledgement of an employee's importance and achievements goes a long way. Nobody wants to be taken for granted. Employees want to feel they are part of the team. They want to know that they count and their performance counts, and that goes for every employee regardless of their level of responsibility.

For this and other tactics to contribute to your company's success there is need for a great deal of commitment on the part of managers. I encourage you today to make a commitment—and more importantly develop a step by step plan—to increase your management success by helping others and, thus, help yourself and your company to: 1) use the strengths of consensus thinking, and 2) encourage employees to be an increasingly important part of the company's decision-making process. It pays to be proactive in broadening each employee's experience and responsibility!