Organizational Communication: The "Trickle-Down" Effect of Management Behavior

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Companies today recognize that having a Code of Ethics is important in establishing a standard of conduct at work. What is less commonly understood is the significance of the "trickle-down" effect in implementing ethical behavior within an organization and the value of a strong internal communication system to create a positive environment in the workplace.

In truth, ethics is all about behavior, and creating an ethical workplace culture starts at the top. Owners and leaders in the C-suite need to be just as accountable to the code of ethics as any employee on the front line. The trickle-down influence is significant to organizational behavior, just as a company's dedication to holding all of its people, regardless of position, accountable for upholding those ethics is essential to internal acceptance of the set code. In the same manner that the level of ethics evident in the C-suite affects management, the level of ethical behavior displayed by managers impacts their teams.

In light of this reality of organizational communication, today's managers would be well served to remember these five keys to ethical behavior:

1. CARING ABOUT PEOPLE: A manager who truly cares is willing to express feelings of compassion, affection and kindness towards the team. Making this a part of the way you lead builds a reservoir of trust for your team to draw on when facing the inevitable ethical challenges that come up. When you actively care about your team, you're more likely to be listening to their concerns, paying close attention to the challenges they face and being made aware of issues before they become a problem. This can only build a stronger team and a more profitable organization.

2. LEVERAGING EXPERIENCE: Every manager comes from a place of experience that gives him or her unique insight into any given situation. Using experience wisely means developing the ability to take information from those circumstances and translate it to something that benefits the company and its people. Sometimes it's hard to control a 'knee-jerk reaction' that is based on your own personal plan or motivations. An ethical manager is capable of recognizing the difference between personal gain and organizational gain. If the gain isn't in alignment with the organization's best interests or the best interests of its people at large, it's important to be able to say "no".

3. ALIGNING WITH COMPANY VISION: When you align with the company vision, it becomes effortless to act in the best interests of the organization. It's clear that the growth and gain of the company is also the growth and gain of its people. There are managers who are motivated primarily by self-gain and finding the path of least resistance up the

corporate ladder. Such managers are usually perceived by their own teams to be arrogant, untrustworthy and unethical. Find a personal goal that is aligned with the vision and mission of your company and watch how this inspires your team to do the same.

4. BEING IN INTEGRITY: There are times and circumstances when it takes an immense amount of courage to act ethically and with integrity. An ethical manager needs to be able to draw from integrity consistently - without putting concerns of personal consequences ahead of the best interests of the team. It's not easy to make hard decisions - especially if you know they will be unpopular with team members - however, these decisions must be made and need to be based in justice after careful deliberation.

5. REMEMBERING THE GOLDEN RULE: People in an organization develop a strong sense of loyalty when they feel they can trust the company and its leaders to be fair. Favoritism and inequitable management of resources or benefits will inevitably destroy any manager's air of integrity. No one wants to be treated as if they're less important than someone else. And no one appreciates their innovative idea being adopted without a nod of appreciation and recognition for their efforts. When you give your team a sense that they're receiving a fair return for their efforts they are far more likely to have loyalty to the team, company management and the organization as a whole.

Ethical behavior within any organization begins at the top. As surely as the behavior from the C-suite affects management, the behavior of management affects the teams they work with. Managers can positively impact the habit of ethical behavior by modeling it and recognizing their influence on the standards and ethics upheld within their teams. When managers model ethical behavior, they strengthen their relationships with individual team members; build trust in the team as a unit and effect growth of the company in its entirety.

The bottom line is that you have to be ethical to expect ethical behavior from others and aligning strong personal values with consistent action in your own behavior will go a long way to inspiring that same philosophy in your team.