

Is Your Past, the Key to Your Future?

By Roberta Chinsky Matuson

Many of us remember the past fondly, even though the events that took place may not have been anything like we remember. We think about those particular moments where we were able to make an impact. We also think about how we might have done things differently if we were given another chance to do things again. I'm not the kind of person that spends too much time in the past. However, I do believe it is beneficial to look back so we can move forward.

Rights of Passage

Do you remember what it was like when you were first promoted into management? I do. I compare the experience to an episode of Grey's Anatomy: Lots of people swirling around, yet few stopping long enough to offer assistance. Like many new Residents, I was tossed into my job and was left to fend for myself. After all, no one trained my boss nor did it appear that anyone trained her boss before her. It was a rite of passage that one was expected to go through on route to the C-Suite. It's been over twenty-five years and from what I can tell, little has changed in terms of the way we develop and support our new leaders.

Now for a moment, imagine how much more productive people would be if they entered into their new roles with a clear sense of how to do their jobs. You do not have to be a large company in order to implement this. In fact, being a small company actually might give you an advantage. Newly minted managers can work directly with senior management, without the middle layers getting in the way. Organizations can quickly establish training and or mentoring programs without having to seek three levels of approval. You can begin small with brown bag "lunch and learns" or you can go big with a off-site meeting facilitated by a management expert who can quickly get people moving in the right direction. What are you waiting for? Get started!

Management Circles

Quality circles were all the rage in the eighties. This is where companies assembled volunteer groups of employees to support one another as they looked for breakthrough ways to improve quality. Next came the CEO circles; a place where CEO's could go to share their most intimate challenges with other like minded CEO's. But nothing to date has been done for those people with the title of manager. These people are without a group to call their own.

I believe the time has come for organizations to assemble management circles. This would be a place where managers would come together to support one another. These groups could be run by an outside facilitator or an experienced professional who has a track record of helping people thrive in management roles. Benefits to the organization include reducing the amount of time it takes

new managers to become productive, decreasing the amount of stress usually associated with a change in management and increased employee retention as workers realize the company is really willing to invest in their people.

Some of you may be thinking that your organization won't be able to participate because you can't make a circle when you only have two managers. For these companies, I would recommend joining up with other firms, who are not in competing businesses, and pooling your resources to create a management circle. I'm so excited by this concept that I will help you get started. This idea sure beats sending your people to some \$1,500 generic management seminar with the hopes they will return as experienced managers.

Deforestation

Have we learned nothing from our past mistakes of wiping out entire levels within organizations? Or in some cases, we've eliminated departments in exchange for outsourcing, where we are now forcing our customers to repeat themselves twenty times as they try to explain to why they are calling.

Do you have anyone left to grow into the positions that will be vacated by the aging Boomers, who will retire within this century? It most likely won't be the receptionist you hired to replace the Office Manager, no matter how talented she may seem. Are you prepared to send out your twenty-something rising star sales representative solo to your top client when her boss leaves for a better offer? Will he have matured enough to take on this responsibility?

Enough with the mass lay-offs. They are harmful to most environments and they still result in dead wood being left around. How do I know this? I was speaking with the spouse of a general manager of a well respected communications company and she was sharing with me how her husband resisted laying off a marginal worker because he thought he could turn his performance around. Eighteen months later and the guy's still hanging on, even though his performance has declined. Wouldn't it have been better if the decision was made to weed out the non-performers (including this guy) rather than letting the negativity spread like wildfire?

Hmmm...maybe looking back is a good thing after all. That is if we learn from our mistakes and we vow to make things better for people as we move forward.

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