**Managing Leaders**

Managing the Leaders requires dedication and insight, not only in one’s self but in others as well. To help build self-esteem in employees and support their inner motivation we must first see ourselves as guides not as bosses. We must recognize this is our community we work in. The business is the community and community works together, helping each other perform in the best possible way. In our community we welcome guest as it would be in our homes and those guest are here walking through the doors to see each of us. Not to buy our goods, but to appreciate our company. Yes there are always rules and guidelines to follow, but we must support the idea we are here to enjoy and have fun. Once every employee makes it their own, they have an ownership, there are no longer rules, but an understanding of what makes a successful business.

As a manager, we must realize we are here to work for the employee. We set examples, so that each employee can be motivated to set their own expectations. That is when we can help them exceed their potential. Most employees only see their limits not understanding their true worth. We must also recognize that each manager is not god, if we fail, we fail alone, and if we succeed, it is because of everyone in the community. Being a manager, I should be able to do every job that I expect my employees to do. The difference is my employees should be able to do it better. Well it was one of the first things I learned.

**Before I was a Manager**

In 1984 Eleanor Johnson looked for me for 2 months, until she found me in Omaha Nebraska. I had applied for a job at Haagen Dazs in Oak Park, IL. 3 months prior before I moved away to Omaha with my sister. Elle, what she liked to be called, had talked to a reference of mine from the application, Mrs. Muszynski. Mrs. Muszynski was a wonderful woman who understood me better than I thought. She was my best friend from high school’s mother and a mother to our group of friends. She told Elle how good of a person I was and that I was extremely talented. I did not recognize that in myself at the time, being that I was known as an introvert and hated to talk to anyone in a group. So she went to my mother’s house and spoke to my mother then my mother called my sister and my sister gave me the message. I had just started a job, but I was back home within the week. I interviewed again with Elle, and she told me why she looked for me. The enthusiasm that Mrs. Muszynski had for me was more than she ever heard before, and she remembered interviewing me the first time. When she opened 2 months ago, she was looking for older employees; she thought older employees would be more efficient and knowledgeable. At the time, it did not work out that way. The more we talked the more she liked me. “You will have to start at the bottom, $3.25 an hour.” “No problem,” I said. As quiet as I was, my thoughts were much bolder, “Soon I will manage this place.” I was 20 years old.

Within the first week I was assigned to cake decorating, she was told I was good with my hands.30 days later I was a shift leader. Within 3 months, I was taking care of all the books, doing the math in my head and memorizing the cost of goods. By 6 months, I was the store manager and collecting bonuses. Before the year was out, I was a business partner, owning 10 percent of the business. The following years we made cakes for the mayor of Chicago, participated in the Taste of Chicago, extended our catering branch, and acquired 2 more stores. For 6 years we were successful, until an unfortunate accident required us to dissolve the business. We could not take it any further. We parted ways and I continued on with the catering. Elle told me she could not have succeeded without me; she saw something in me she wanted to help bring out. Moreover, she did.

Without ever having that experience of working with someone who not only appreciated what I had to offer, but drove me to do more with it, I never would have looked at my employees and experienced their insight, their strengths and weaknesses. Each employee is always an equal, they bring with them individuality and knowledge, along with the hunger to give their best for themselves. I have had the pleasure of working with teenagers and adults older than myself. In addition, it is true each set of individuals came with a desire all their own. They have acquired knowledge, or no knowledge at all about certain task they were asked to perform. What they did have in common was their desire for respect and acceptance.

**In 1999**

I started working at Oberweis as a store manager with my preconceived ideas about managing. I let that all go the minute I walked in the door, and found myself facing employees with more experience than me with the company. I worked and opened the Oberweis Store in Oak Park in May of 1999 and quit in October of 2002. My reasons for leaving were part family and part of the outlook I had about the company. I could not balance the job, and my supervisors and employees. I was an excellent manager, as I was told by the Vice President of the Dairy Stores. Nevertheless, not a good leader, I came to realize. My immediate supervisor and I never saw eye to eye and I took it personally, but I always got results. I always knew how to follow the rules, but making everyone else follow them was difficult. The other stores were not following simple rules, so I made waves. I never looked as each individual as a part of a team just someone to do what I wanted. Furthermore, if they could not do it, I did it myself and they, the employees knew it. Therefore, I ended up doing a lot of extra work. I worked more hours than needed. I had a 45-hour workweek and worked at least 60 hours a week that is 15 extra hours I could not have for myself. Consequently, in October of 2002, through shear frustration I quit my job, with no job prospects.

**Back to the Beginning**

Calmer and more centered I reapplied at Oberweis Dairy in May of 2003, eight months later. I interviewed with my previous supervisor, who was now Vice President of Dairy Stores. Three days later the more comforting version of me was hired and placed in a store that was having trouble. I was asked to, “Clean house.” They knew me as a strict follow the rules type manager, and knew I could do it. The company assumed within a year the store should turn around and increase profit again. The store was in Downers Grove a once successful store. In 2000 the sales were up by 13.9% over the previous year. By 2002, when the new manager took over, the sales had dropped to only 1.5% over the previous year.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 2005 | 2.9% |
| 2004 | 5.0% |
| 2003 | 8.2% |
| 2002 | 1.5% |
| 2001 | 9.5% |
| 2000 | 13.9% |
|  |  |
|  |  |

Sales report Oberweis Dairy

I was nervous my first week there, being left alone to salvage the store. I did not know how the other employees would act toward me. I left the company the first time because the awkward situations they would put me in. I was given an assistance who was a drug user, one who wanted my job. One of them hated teenagers and was an alcoholic. Another one just did not like people of color, and at the time my store was 95% black. He was the only one I could talk too about our differences. This time around, I did not take it personally and could see past the problem. They believed in me, and knew I could do the job. I took notes on the employees and gave them all reviews, which took 2 weeks. My District Manager wanted me to fire them and start over; I did not see it that way. Some would stay and some would leave. From then on reviews were given every six months. The store turned around in less than 3 months, and the employees were happier with themselves.

**Notes about the Employees**

There were employees who stayed after the management changed. The existing employees were a challenge. They were used to doing things their way and not getting positive results. The speed of service was fast, but the overall service was not what was expected. The employees did not care about the job at all only that they were fast. Most of them felt it wasn’t their place so they just worked fast to get the customers out, and they could collect a paycheck in the end. There were several employees who had talent that stood out, but they did not have any direction. One employee was a good employee with good work ethics, but felt he had nothing really to contribute. Yes, there were some who quit or I had to be fired.

John was my appointed assistant, who came from a different store in Elmhurst. He understood the ends and out of the company, but himself had a hard time following the rules. He set the standards high for employees though and he was tuff, but not fair. His personality was demanding, controlling, and self-righteous. Later I found out he was a fair manager, but was never taught how to lead. After three months with me he was promoted to store manager.

Danielle replaced John as my assistant; she was the youngest assistant manager ever at Oberweis Dairy. She was fast, neat, and gave great customer service. She was also insecure, and naive. I pushed her beyond her own limitations. Knowing that she was capable, she decided to finish college. She was by far the best assistant I ever had. Presently, she works a buyer at a clothing firm, her dream job.

John was an employee who had been working at that location for more than 3 years. He was extremely fast, but not accurate or clean. When some of his fellow friends decided to quit, he did also. I asked him why and he said, “I don’t know, because everyone else is.” I told him he was a good employee; I loved his enthusiasm about his job, and his honesty. He said, “No one has ever told me I was a good employee before,” and decided to try my brand of leadership. We had worked together for a week by then. Within 3 months, his performance with weights and measures got better. He was not as messy as he was before and he listened to my suggestion as well as I listened to his. He showed me some things they had done before and I asked if he liked the procedures before, “No, not really,” he said. John would continue to work after he would clock out. I would inform him I appreciate the help, but he needs to value his time, so either clock back in or do not work. By the end of the first year, he reduced his hours down to just weekends so that he could start seminary school. He wanted to be a priest. I promoted him to shift leader against the suggestion of my boss. He did, and was a good shift leader. Presently he is still in school and works part time in the store.

Adam was a good worker, who had great leadership skills, but he needed to put them to work. Everyone liked him, and he did get the job done efficiently and correctly. I promoted him to shift leader right after I started. After his first review, I realized I did not place the same responsibility on him as I did the other shift leaders. Therefore, I gave him another review and apologized for my behavior, and told him I was being unfair to him. He could handle the same responsibility as the others; I was letting him down by not having the same expectations. Finally, by his third review, he was afraid people only did their job for him because they liked him and not because they respected him. For me, the job was being done on the shift, but I was not aware of his feeling. Therefore, he stepped up his game for himself. Actually, he found his shift ran smoother, when everyone took responsibility for them selves and their performance. He always enjoyed high performance sports, never afraid of any challenge. This was his biggest one.

Sam was slow in making products but excellent in training the proper way to put everything together. He was very patience and eager. Therefore, I made him my personal in store trainer to help train all franchisees. His expertise was being exact and proud of it. He was well aware of his inability to give fast service. Not one employee was as accurate as he was. It did create some controversy at first, but I explained my reasoning to the staff and everyone understood. Sam was not as fast at serving the customers, so pulling him off line and giving him training duties was a better way of utilizing an enthusiastic employee. He took ownership of that job, instead of feeling slow in the service area.

Drake was an employee who was brought to me by an employee who quit. It was in the beginning of the transition. This employee could not work for me. Before I came she was a star performer, and we talked about that. However, I informed her I wanted everyone to be a star performer. She thought it would be impossible and she would lose her light of being a star. I wanted her to understand we all have light; we can all share in our own way. At that moment when she quit, I thought I would not hear from her again until Drake applied for a job. He told me she thought I would be a good manager, just not for her and recommended that he work with me. A year before he went to the peace corp, he wrote about his experience working with me online to the company. It was the best experienced he ever had and he felt better for it.

Isaac was a former employee of mine from my Oak Park management days. When he turned 16, his mother asked if I could hire him. I did. When he went to college, he found out, I was working in Downers Grove and wanted to work for me. I hired him as a shift leader and told him he still needed training, but he was so eager and over confident I let him run the shift we were working, and I would score him later on it. It so happens we get a quality service shop that night by my district manager and another district manager. I was not upset; I knew it was my choice to let him run the shift. We failed of course and I was going to go on probation if my combined scores were low. Well, 95, 90, and 50 the average is below 80. It was worth it because he told me that night; he will never get under a 90 for the rest of his time working. He got a 98 on his next shop, better than I ever did. In addition, I was not there. He presently works for the CIA.

Other employees did not feel they had a lot to offer. They were either too focused or not focused enough. One employee found himself doing supplementary things instead his job, thereby making it harder on other crewmembers. Nevertheless, he gave excellent customer service. He could not focus if business slowed down, so the shift leaders were always required to give him a list. He was an actor outside of work. I actually used him in a training film for the company. His older sister worked there and his younger sister also. It seemed to be a family tradition. His sister informed me the store had never run as smooth with prior managers. She had worked there through high school and decided to come back part time in the summer while on vacation. It was cleaner and more productive than before and everyone seemed to enjoy his or her job.

Dan was a part time employee who was laid back, and acted like one of those surfer dudes. He never took life for granted and never too seriously. However, he managed to do an excellent job of managing the shift when he was left in charge. Years later, I saw him and he was working in the inner city as a high school teacher.

Carley came in as a new scooper and within a year became the youngest shift leader at Oberweis Dairy. Her biggest concern was would the older employees respect her enough to listen. Not only did they listen but also her expertise was used at other Oberweis stores. With her input, I created a shift leader-training program. It was used to help all shift leaders throughout Oberweis have the same training and expectations as our store. It should not matter what store they would be assigned to, they should be able to run without any problems. Presently she is a restaurant manager in Downers Grove at a small family owned location.

Dan is a person with an attitude of whatever dude. He started out as a scooper in 2003, finished college and is presently working at Oberweis as a shift leader. His patience gives him an insight that most of us do not have. He still talks about me as a manager and decided to come back because he appreciated the job he had while he was in school. He went to school for statistics and the job he had did not fulfill his needs. He preferred honesty to dishonesty. So scooping ice cream is a wonderful thing for now.

**Strategy**

To help build self-esteem and inner motivation I had to realize that success was theirs, so was the motivation. No one was punished for thinking outside the box. If it did not work, the failure would be mine. I had rules and boundaries, but the ones who were self motivated adhered to every one of them. They were asked if they thought there were reasonable expectations. Showing up for work when scheduled, having someone replace you if you could not make it. Simple things, like follow the recipes. We met every week to discuss issues with customers or employees or new adventures we would like to take on. It would seem I worked a lot more, but I did not, once my staff was set I never worked more than 45 hours a week and it only took 3 months to put it together. When I worked as a manager before, I worked more than 60 hours a week, because I had a different approach to everything. I was managing and banging my head against the wall, and lowering my expectation, in summary I was failing my employees before. The beginning strategy was to show everyone that he or she had a place here at the store if they wanted it. Every one of the employees knew I was there working for them, making them better leaders. In March of 2005, I was promoted to Training instructor and left the store. That was the only time in the history of an Oberweis Dairy store, that the turn around happened so quickly.