



The 'write' tools for empowered leadership

By Pam Hurley, Ph.D., Hurley Write Inc.

How can effective leadership be taken full circle? The most effective leaders empower their employees to complete work tasks competently, creatively, and independently, essentially freeing the employer to complete different tasks.

Successful businesses hire employees who can think for themselves and who can critically analyze and complete the tasks set before them. These employees in turn reflect positively on a business. Communication skills — or lack thereof — are an immediate reflector of a business.

An important aspect of communication is the written word. While a negative assessment of a poorly written note or memo might be unfair, the truth is that often a written document is all that a potential client has to determine a business' capabilities. A letter or document that is difficult to read and understand can — and often does — cost companies money by reflecting poorly on a business' capabilities.

Aside from sending the wrong message to clients, poor communication skills can weaken employee morale, increase frustration and create unnecessary delays, all of which costs a business time and money.

While almost all businesses complain about their employees' writing skills, few understand that combating poor communication demands effective leadership. Below are some methods to help establish solid writing within a business.

Cultivating good writers

Contrary to popular belief, writers aren't born — they're created. Effective leaders understand that they must provide writers with the tools necessary to execute a written task successfully. Writers must have, for instance, more than simply knowledge of grammar. In any task, the more tools employees are given, the more resources they have to competently write a document.

Providing employees with an environment in which they understand the value of their communication skills is a good

first step. One idea is to encourage writers to discuss their writing tasks with their peers. This can involve weekly sessions where employees talk about what works and what doesn't in their writing, what difficulties they have when writing, and how they plan and execute writing documents. From these sessions, writers learn tips from other writers, learn more about their own writing habits, and begin to understand that others might have the same issues or trouble spots.

By encouraging discussion about writing, a company lets its employees know that it places a priority on good communication skills. More tangible tools include resources such as books and other reading materials, from novels to short stories and biographies. Research shows that reading often — and reading various types of written material — improves writing skills.

Editing as a team effort

Business owners also should encourage dialogue during the editing process. Employees might not put enough emphasis on what they've written, for fear that a manager will rewrite it. Others admit that they don't have enough time to edit a document once it's been written.

The goal of an editing dialogue is to help managers understand how each person writes, and to help writers under-

stand why a manager changes words and concepts. Through this process, writers are empowered to make solid decisions on their writing because they understand the reasoning behind the changes. Creating an environment in which managers coach writers through dialogue helps create an environment in which good communication is viewed as a team effort.

Seeking outside help

For businesses considering outside help, hiring a professional to conduct writing classes or coach groups of writers is a good start.

A professional should be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the documents each writer produces, create a writing class or classes that specifically address those strengths and weaknesses, and coach or provide one-on-one mentoring for writers who request it.

Such classes should focus on giving writers the tools they need to be more effective and efficient. They should be presented to employees as a way for them to enhance their skills, because a company trusts them to write documents that reflect positively on the business. ○○○

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