

The Closing and Relocation of a Call Center

In this case study, you are the regional human resource director for a Fortune 500 company. You receive an unexpected visit from your vice president of human resources (VP of HR), who informs you that there is a reorganization taking place within your company. He starts by explaining that the president of the company has decided to retire after 28 years, and the new president has decided to move the current headquarters from the Northeast to Texas. No business reason was provided. There will be almost 1,000 employees redeployed since the company has existed in the Northeast for more than 75 years. This information will be released to employees within the next week. The call center—with more than 500 employees, including your office that is located within it—will also be relocated to another southern state. All employees will be offered their current positions and a relocation package if they wish to move. Those who do not want to relocate will be given a severance package with outplacement services provided. Mr. Davis, your VP of HR, is aware that you hired most of the individuals working in the call center and that you are very familiar with the culture and employee status. This news will be devastating to the employees because they have made this the most productive and efficient call center within this global corporation. Mr. Davis came to get your advice on how to best handle the communications plan for announcing this news in your region. Mr. Davis has taken care of notifications to the state and federal government (i.e., the 60-day notice required according to the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification [WARN] Act, which announces that the business is relocating and that employees will be redeployed). From previous experience, Mr. Davis shares with you that you will be contacted by the state to set up meetings so that the state may address all of the employees concerning the state benefits and services available to the employees. Mr. Davis shares two important messages from the new president: (1) Although this news may be unsettling to many employees, business must be conducted in the same professional manner as always, with the least amount of disruption; and (2) whether the employees decide to relocate or not, while they are employed, they must maintain productivity levels, and their metrics will be monitored as usual. Mr. Davis informs you that Mr. Woods, senior vice president (SVP) of the region, who is responsible for the call center, is being told of this reorganization via a conference call with his boss on the West Coast and the president of the company. Mr. Woods will be joining you and Mr. Davis to plan the communications shortly. Mr. Davis wants to get a head start on planning with you because he has a flight scheduled back to headquarters that afternoon. You begin to outline a plan for the communications strategy; for example, you include information that will assist Mr. Woods in preparation for his meeting with his direct reports where he will deliver the news. Other questions you think about during the development of the outline are as follows: What information will Mr. Woods give to his direct reports this afternoon, and what will he give them to share with their managers and employees? Mr. Davis sees your outline, and he encourages you to develop your outline into a communication plan/plan of action and to continue to share it with Mr. Woods.

Before Mr. Davis leaves for the airport, he asks you to report back to him with any issues or difficulties you are experiencing with employees. Mr. Davis also asks that you report the following information to him: How many employees do you think will want to relocate? What do they want to know about the new location? What can he do to help answer these questions for the employees? What can he do to assist you with the communication plan or any activities you plan within the next 60-day period? Mr. Davis gives you all of his contact numbers and reminds you that he is available to you for questions and concerns at any time. Analyze the information presented in this case study, present your communication plan, and answer the questions below. Your case study paper should be at least three pages in length and should follow APA guidelines. Your communication plan should address the following questions:

What are your concerns? For example, how will you motivate the employees to stay throughout the 60 days if they have other job offers? How will you motivate all employees to maintain their productivity levels? In the article “Semper Fidelis! A Recipe for Leading Others,” which is part of your Required Reading for this unit, Aubrey Daniels describes how a person earns leadership status and explains the importance of positive reinforcement. How will your plan help you to establish yourself as a positive reinforcer? What leadership style does Mr. Davis exhibit? Propose at least three leadership theories that could be applied to this situation. How will these theories advance or affect employee motivation?

semper fidelis!

a recipe for leading others

Aubrey Daniels, Ph.D.

The Army infantry used the slogan “Follow me!” during World War II, but history shows us that some soldiers didn’t heed the call. On several occasions, the officer leading a charge was shot in the back, and not while running from the enemy. Apparently, the act of following commands leadership, and leadership is never bestowed by simply giving someone a fancy title.

The U. S. Marine Corps did and continues to do things a bit differently. The Corps’ signature motto is “Semper Fidelis,” meaning always faithful. The phrase seems appropriate because faith of the followers plays a great role in leadership. The people I know who have retired from the Corps still live by its standards and continue to identify strongly with its values, and most eventually have had their relationship with the Corps commemorated on their gravestones.

This enduring loyalty was not borne from some mysterious cosmic interaction. The Corps knows how to systematically create this type of loyalty. How? First, it strips recruits of almost every positively reinforcing aspect of their lives and then makes them earn those reinforcers back one at a time, all the while recognizing progress with subtle approval and camaraderie. By the time those recruits graduate from Marine basic training, they’re ready to take on the world.

Am I suggesting this is the way to treat employees? No, but the Marines’ approach illustrates the powerful impact of positive reinforcement on behavior and its proven effect on the elusive entity we call loyalty. Of course, the Corps’ method is not practical for application in the workplace, but neither is the bulk of existing literature regarding leadership. That’s because many people don’t understand the worlds-apart

difference between a manager and a leader – and I’m not just talking about those at the top of an organization.

Management is really the authority granted to someone by an organization to use consequences. A manager has the authority to dish out discipline, give a raise, promote, demote and terminate. Companies may grant that authority to everyone from team leaders to supervisors to managers to executives. Leadership, on the other hand, is the authority granted by the followers for someone to use consequences. Organizations can make someone a manager, but leadership must be earned. Leadership status, then, is authority earned and reflected by the voluntary loyalties that leadership behaviors inspire and can be found at any level of the organization.

One might describe leadership as the ability to motivate people to do things in the absence of direct contingency. In other words, a

leader can get people to do things when it doesn't seem, in the immediate present at least, to be in their best interest to do so. For example, if I let you lead me, I am willing, to a certain extent, to subjugate myself to consequences that you put in place.

The upside of being a leader is that leaders, I'm convinced, receive more reinforcement from followers than do managers. That's primarily because with leadership, the followers are voluntarily led, so naturally they feel more positive toward the leader than they would toward a manager. Using this definition, anybody can be a leader. That's why people often informally grant leadership status to a peer. Also, if a leader is the source of frequent, timely reinforcement for a person or a group of people, whatever is important to the leader is important to them.

A big downside of being a leader is that leaders need to encourage behaviors that favor the strategic direction of the company, even when those behaviors may initially be unpopular. Leaders have to make decisions even when the workforce doesn't immediately positively reinforce them for those decisions. Therefore, true leaders hold steady in difficult decisions when attaining reinforcement is not immediate. Leaders stick to principles and values that may temporarily take people where they don't necessarily want to go. One might compare leadership to pulling a heavy load with a string. If you pull too hard or too suddenly, you'll break the string, but if you stay in front and pull with constancy, eventually you can move a pretty heavy load.

One client my company worked with, a vice president of an energy company, would meet with his team at the beginning of the day and tell them, "Here's what we need to do today," and then send them on their way. In the afternoon, he would go out in the plant to see how they were doing and if they were doing what he had asked of them. Basically, he was checking to see who had made his priority their priority and who had put it off, most likely saying, "Yeah I was trying to get around to it but didn't have time." If your No. 1 priority is communicated and carried out, you have willing followers.

How does one acquire leadership status? It really comes down to the consistent pairing of antecedents (what one says will happen) and consequences (what does happen). A big problem in most modern organizations is that the pairing between antecedents and consequences is very low from the top down. In other words, by the time a goal is achieved by employees down the line, the executive who promised recognition for that achievement may already have moved on to bigger and better things. If such oversights occur frequently, employees no longer take the promises, or their need to work hard for promised consequences, as seriously. This is why creating leaders at the manager and supervisor level is so important. The more closely managers and supervisors pair what they say they will do with what they actually do, the greater chance there is of having willing followers at the frontline.

To earn leadership status, a person must consistently pair what is said with what is done. And, of course, the consequences have to be to a performer's advantage, which means that leaders in one way or another have to deliver positive reinforcement. If behavior is driven by negative reinforcement, as soon as an employee gets away from you, it's over. They're out and gone, and they're never looking back.

How do you establish yourself as a positive reinforcer? Here are three ways to do just that:

1. Do what you say you are going to do. The best advice is to say less and do more. If you are in a new position, don't make promises early. Unexpected events will surely reduce trust rather than increase it. It is also better to announce what you've done rather than communicate what you intend to do.

2. Be a student. When taking on a new role, it's best to spend time learning about the followers and what they do. It has been discovered that the single most important leadership behavior is monitoring – inquiring into the relationship between the performer and his work. Ask, "How did you do that?" People can always teach you valuable things about the organization.

3. Discover the positive reinforcers of the followers. We all have our own unique set of positive reinforcers. While you don't need

to know all of the reinforcers of those you work with, you do need to know some. Spend time learning what they are. If you don't know or aren't sure, ask. That in and of itself is reinforcing to some.

Ultimately, history shows us that anybody can become a leader. If you tell people that when they do this, a positive consequence will happen, and sure enough it happens, then after a period of time, people will trust you. People eventually learn to have faith in people who consistently do what they say. Do what you say you will do enough times, and people will respect you. And will remain *semper fidelis*.

Here are a few ways to measure how you are doing as a leader in creating willing followers:

1. When you communicate a priority to your team, check later in the day to see how many have taken action on it, as opposed to those who make excuses about not having time, etc. Make sure that you positively reinforce the actors.

2. Check to see what behaviors followers engage in to verify if those behaviors will address the priority. We found in a study that when a priority was passed down three levels, only 11 percent of supervisors actually were working on behaviors that would accomplish what the leader needed.

3. How long does it take for followers to take action? If the followers take more than a week to act, you have failed to provide proper reinforcement.

4. Make a list of all the commitments you make in meetings and individual

conversations in order to track the percentage of your follow-through on what you said you would do.

5. On all commitments that take some time to complete, make a list and post it outside your office showing weekly progress.

6. Check how frequently peers help others complete their priority tasks.

7. How many suggestions do followers make for supporting the mission, vision and values of the leader? Some managers set a quota for ideas per week, per supervisor or manager. This refers to ideas that bubble up without asking, demanding or setting quotas.

Aubrey Daniels, a thought leader and internationally recognized expert on management, leadership, safety and workplace issues, is considered an authority on human behavior in the workplace. As founder of his consulting firm, Aubrey Daniels International, he and his staff help organizations employ the timeless principles of behavioral science to re-energize the workplace, optimize performance and achieve lasting results. Aubrey actively blogs about performance systems, workplace safety and management issues, is frequently interviewed for major media outlets, and pens a regular guest blog for Talent Management Magazine.

In addition to being a highly sought after keynote speaker at major association, conference and educational events, Aubrey is the author of six best-selling books widely recognized as international management classics: *Performance Management: Changing Behavior That Drives Organizational Effectiveness*, *Bringing out the Best in People: How to Apply the Astonishing Power of Positive Reinforcement*; *Other People's Habits*, *Measure of a Leader*, *Oops! 13 Management Practices that Waste Time and Money (and what to do instead)*, and *Safe by Accident?* His books have been translated into Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Spanish and French and have been licensed in China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Romania and Saudi Arabia.

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