



Adherence to Leadership Principles

Many gaming organizations have come to understand the importance of operating with consistent principles of leadership. The notion is simple: all managers need to adhere to standards of leadership so that all employees know what is expected of them and what the consequences may be if they choose not to meet those expectations. To this end, managers are taught how to communicate expectations, follow up when expectations are not being met, counsel employees and, if necessary, discipline them. Gaming organizations often go to great lengths to teach managers how to lead in a consistent manner, employing outside consultants or developing leadership training programs in house.

Despite the best efforts of casino human resource departments, many managers fail to adhere to the principles of leadership they had been taught to embrace. The reasons for this are many. Managers and supervisors bring with them certain habits and styles of leadership that they were taught by others, more often than not, by mimicking managers that had once led them. Often they revert to those habits. In addition, turnover within the gaming organization, particularly at more senior levels, means that new managers may not be familiar with or simply consider themselves above the leadership principles of the organization.

Moreover, there is a difference between leadership principles and the day-to-day tactics that managers employ in order to be effective. These tactics are manifested in a number of ways and at all levels in the gaming organization, from supervisor to chief operating officer. Collectively they undermine the property's leadership strategy and create less than optimal work environments. Some of the more common tactics are discussed in this article.

We Need Some Volunteers

It is common for casinos to ask that all managers and supervisors be on property for major events such as New Year's Eve. It is generally understood that their presence is required during these peak demand periods. However, often requests are made to the salaried population to "volunteer" for a special event. This may include a headline act in the events center or charity event. Salaried employees are asked to supervise, assist in seating people or fulfill other tasks on a volunteer basis. Employees that do so believe they are part of the team and are making a positive contribution to the organization. However, often volunteer work is requested because the casino is trying to keep its labor costs in check and this is an abuse of the volunteer system.

Asking employees if they would like to assist in feeding the homeless on Thanksgiving Day is a noble form of volunteerism. Asking a supervisor if they would like to volunteer

to seat people at an upcoming concert is maltreatment of salaried labor.

Split Shifts

Supervisors often struggle with some of the more mundane tasks such as scheduling. Without training in scheduling techniques, many supervisors are forced to employ tactics that foster resentment among employees. Because casinos and their supporting non-gaming outlets operate with certain peak demand periods, supervisors often resort to scheduling techniques that are effective at keeping labor costs down. However, the consequence is often employee dissatisfaction.

One of the more common techniques is scheduling employees to work split shifts. A split shift essentially requires an employee to clock in for say, a four-hour period, perhaps during a lunchtime rush, and then clock out. The employee would then resume the shift four hours later during the middle of the evening shift. While a minority of employees, particularly those that live close to the casino, may like this kind of scheduling, the vast majority of employees do not. They are forced to endure two commutes to and from work every day along with higher transportation costs and less personal time.

Double Back Shifts

A further manifestation of poor scheduling techniques is the practice of scheduling employees to double back shifts. A double back shift is one where an employee works eight hours, takes eight hours off and then must return to work another eight hour shift. Invariably, on the second shift the employee is sluggish, more prone to errors, and simply tired. Also, their customer service skills are diminished. Nevertheless, it remains a common practice, particularly in those departments that suffer from high turnover rates, and is another manifestation of bad leadership.

I'll Get Back to You

Often employees approach managers with issues and problems that they face in their work lives. It may concern relationships with other employees, workplace safety or even a suggestion on how to make the workplace more effective. Managers and supervisors often dismiss these issues with the simple statement, "I'll get back to on that," and fail to ever make mention of it again.

When a manager promises to get back to an employee and then fails to do so, it creates false expectations, reduces the level of trust between management and the employee population and increases frustration among line employees. Employees begin

to realize that what they say has no meaning and that they are truly not being heard. It is this kind of inaction by managers that invites labor organizing efforts.

I Need My Own People

The most egregious failure of a property's adherence to its principles of leadership occurs when a new leader comes on property and immediately terminates people that report to him. This can happen at any level but is most evident and most damaging when it occurs at the senior level. A new general manager may dismiss his marketing director, slot director or HR manager with the blanked statement, "I need my own people around me," as if this statement is a reasonable justification for firing someone.

This action is taken without first taking stock in the people who have been loyal to the gaming enterprise and who have intimate knowledge of the property, employees, customers and markets. The notion that a manager should be replaced by someone that the new general manager knows and trusts is flawed on several levels. It makes the blanket assumption that whoever is being terminated is incompetent and the replacement possesses some special knowledge that will somehow make the department or property run better. It also fails to adhere to a casino's termination policies where an employee is first counseled and given opportunities to improve work performance or behavior. It is an action that is disruptive to the work environment, can damage morale and can be deleterious to the gaming enterprise, particularly if the fired manager had performed his/her job well. Worst of all, should the general manager leave, "his people" soon follow like pilot fish following a shark in the ocean, leaving the property with several key positions vacant instead of just one.

Sound leadership principles have a place in every gaming organization. They provide managers with a consistent methodology to address a wide range of employee concerns. When administered effectively, they increase productivity, improve morale and enhance customer service. When they are followed

haphazardly or inconsistently, they foster discontent among the employee population, invite organizing efforts and make subsequent recruiting efforts more difficult. ♣

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