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Smart moves, delegation, make management, change easier

Several years ago, I was the production manager for a satellite plant of a manufacturing firm. Roger, one of the senior managers from "corporate," was visiting for a few days. After a long day at work, he asked if I was interested in playing racquetball.

Now I didn't consider myself to be a racquetball ace, but I played (and lost) regularly to my wife (she's also tough with a tennis racquet or ping pong paddle). I was in good physical condition. I knew Roger played regularly, but he had 20, maybe 25 years on me. I liked my chances.

I learned a lot during the next couple of hours. While I raced around the racquetball court like it was my asylum cell, Roger calmly positioned himself in the middle and strategically placed balls everywhere, causing my fitful meandering. I'm not sure what traveled more, me or the ball.

I played faster. I played stronger. Roger played smart-



Rick
Brimeyer

er. And won ... by a lot.

I thought of my racquetball match with Roger recently as

I observed two supervisors who were responsible for implementing the same improvement in neighboring departments of an organization. The improvement required behavioral changes among employees in order to succeed. That meant that it would require constant monitoring and feedback during the critical first habit-forming month.

The first supervisor (whom I'll call "Roger") immediately called his staff together to talk about the improvement. He made it clear why the change was necessary and set clear expectations for their required actions to support the change.

Roger chose one of his

employees ("Anna") who had a vested interest in seeing the new process succeed and had shown budding leadership skills. He asked her to be the department's champion for the new process by monitoring adherence, coaching discrepancies and reinforcing positive behaviors.

Roger introduced Anna as the local champion and gave her one minute during each daily huddle to quickly summarize the prior day's results relative to the new process and to remind everyone of why it was important. She even brought in cupcakes to celebrate when the team reached five consecutive days of full compliance.

Roger didn't simply abdicate responsibility for the issue, however, to Anna. He developed a couple of quick visual cues during his daily rounds through the department that told him immediately whether the situation was under control. When it was in control, he merely continued on his way and later com-

plimented Anna. On the rare occasion when it wasn't, he and Anna would determine the root cause for the discrepancy and address it.

The second supervisor (I'll call him "Rick") also called his staff together to talk about the change. He wasn't quite as compelling regarding the reasoning for the new process, only that it was "something the organization's leaders want us to do." It was the last time the change was discussed.

Rick knew he would be held responsible if the change didn't stick in his area. As a result, he added it to the already long list of items he monitored as he made his daily rounds. When he found a discrepancy, he fixed it himself, reasoning it would take longer to find and coach the violator than to simply take care of it.

I had an opportunity to check in with both supervisors two months after the announced change. "How's it going?" I asked.

"Great!" reported Roger.

"According to Anna's audits, our adherence is well over 95 percent. We still have some issues with new employees so we're going to start emphasizing the process more in our local orientation process. I hardly spend any time on it anymore as people's habits have changed. Better yet, Anna's taken the lead on another improvement project."

"No so good," Rick said. "My people just don't get it. I was busy before this and now they've thrown another log on the mule's wagon. I don't know how much more of this I can take."

I explained that I knew exactly how he felt. Three games of racquetball with Roger will do that.

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