

HOW TO AVOID MACHO MANAGEMENT

There's room for a whole range of management styles in today's business world. If you need to engage hearts and minds in your business, you need to take a consultative and democratic approach.

If time is pressing or there is an urgent imperative at stake, a more autocratic style works best (if you hear a fire alarm for instance, you aren't about to set up a focus group and start asking 'well, what do you think we should do?'). In these circumstances, it would be appropriate to be a little more directive!) The key to being a successful manager today is about being flexible and positive in your approach.

However, despite the fact that the business world has changed beyond all recognition in the last 20 years, we still have a legacy of macho management a negative and often highly damaging style of leadership that first developed in the hierarchical organisations in the 50s and 60s. So why do I still come across examples in the hugely different business world of the 21st Century? And what do we mean by macho management? For me, there are 3 types of macho manager;

'The Bully'

The Bully is the worst kind of macho manager, exerting authority in a damaging way, without respect for the rights of others. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, describes this approach as a set of toxic behaviours displayed by a person who uses their personal and professional power to crush the power of others.

Often aggressive and dominating, they create unhealthy levels of stress in their teams by being inconsistent, highly critical and by singling people out. This approach is self-defeating as the results they achieve are won through fear, which means that whilst they may work in the short term, there will be no commitment or loyalty in the long term and the ultimate result will be a low performing team and high staff turnover. In the meantime, no staff members will risk making mistakes, so there will be a lack of

creativity and a tendency to avoid taking responsibility for fear of reprisals.

One of my clients described her experience of a bullying manager, who constantly set her up to humiliate her in meetings, firing unexpected questions at her and heavily criticising her responses. Others in the meeting were too scared to speak in her defence. She has since left the organisation, and knows of at least 4 others who have left the same small team in the last few months.

'The Martyr'

The Martyr Manager sets themselves up as a hero, taking on more work than anyone else, dealing with unpleasant tasks, and, most importantly, working longer hours than anyone else. The important point is they don't keep this to themselves. Martyr managers are usually trying to show how indispensable they are to the organisation, so they revel in fire-fighting. Although, as management writer Steve McDermott says, 'Some of the best fire-fighters are also some of the best arsonists!'

Under the guise of being a positive role model for their team, they subtly (or not so subtly) put pressure on their staff by encouraging feelings of guilt and by developing a culture of long working hours and presenteeism. i.e. where what is valued is how many hours you're putting in, rather than what you've achieved.

As a result, very long working days become the norm and staff are much less productive than they could be.

Having worked for a martyr manager in the early part of my career, I was able to see the impact this had on the team. Although both myself and my colleagues were hard working and highly professional, our manager constantly implied that we weren't doing enough.

She regularly let us know how long she worked in the evenings and how she was constantly in demand by the business.

The result was that our working day became longer and longer until we all started to treat 8am to 7pm as a normal working day. I began to notice that, not only were we not getting any more done - work just seemed to stretch to fill the time - but we were all beginning to show signs of stress through an increase in health problems.

The Competitor'

Like the Fast Show character, Competitive Dad this is someone who needs to win at any cost. Whilst some aspects of competition are positive and necessary in business, an overly competitive manager will create an atmosphere of conflict within the organisation, based on a win, you lose

Some years ago, I attended a management conference organised by an IT company I was working with. The aim of the conference was to break down the silo mentality in the organisation and look at ways to help the company improve their market position. Two of the senior managers who presented made it clear that they did not have the company's interests at heart, but were only focussed on showing how much more effective their own departments were. This did not go unnoticed, and within 6 months both had left the organisation.

Competitor Managers will create divisions between, and sometimes within, teams by always striving to be the winner at any cost. Sometimes this approach is demonstrated in a less obvious way. You come across managers who outwardly express support for their peers or team members, whilst covertly undermining them.

One of my executive coaching clients has just identified that one of his peers, who had always been a confidante, and apparently supportive of his work, had been criticising his approach to others and also claiming some of his ideas as her own.

So why are these destructive management behaviours still with us? Well, I believe that most of those who operate with this approach are doing so because they are covering up a lack of leadership ability. And because of this, they find it easier to bully and cajole others into performing than to engage and inspire them. It's also true that some managers have had poor role models, and so have adopted this behaviour as they believe it's the right way to manage.

And before you start thinking this has nothing to do with you and your approach, just ask yourself if you ever demonstrate some of these characteristics when you're leading your teams. What is your default style? If you naturally tend to be more autocratic than democratic in style, you may be in danger of adopting a macho management style on occasions.

Your Call to Action

So, to develop your own more positive and supportive management style, you need to;

- Become more aware of your natural leadership style. If any of the descriptions ring true for you, what is the impact on you? On your team?
- Involve others more in decision making. Find opportunities to get the views and ideas of others - and take them seriously. This will encourage a more open and positive culture
- Do more asking than telling. Focus on finding out more about your team members and what they have to offer. The more you learn about their strengths and what drives them, the more likely you are to be able to engage them and make the best use of their talents.
- Recognise efforts and achievements. Just saying thank you and recognising where someone has put in extra effort can have a big impact. This in turn will help to create a more motivated and productive workforce.