

## Getting Buy-In

You can gain commitment by involving the responsible parties in developing operations procedures.

by Mark Heymann



Over the past few months I have had multiple discussions with present and prospective business partners regarding the topic of getting management buy-in to new systems, financial improvement tactics, or employee motivational methods. All of these conversations revolved around commitment to the “program.”

In one case an organization was bemoaning its inability to get property management to achieve the monthly goals that the corporate office was setting. In another, an organization was of the opinion that their management teams could not effectively utilize the new technology that they were exploring, and therefore decided to stay with an older system which they readily admitted was highly inefficient. There are others but I think you get the idea.

Commitment to new goals or proposed changes to new tools is hard to achieve. In fact some of the changes that organizations have had to make during the last year would have been unthinkable previously, but became necessary because the economic crisis was so significant. This is an issue that has perplexed businesses for years but one that, given the proper approach, can be dealt with successfully.

When thinking about this challenge, I was reminded of a situation in a hotel in Atlanta about 25 years ago. A resident manager didn't like how the bell staff was attired and thought their appearance was inconsistent with the positioning of the hotel (long hair, beards, etc.) So, he put out a new grooming policy that is categorically rejected by the bell staff, so much so that they threaten to look into becoming unionized. So now we have a senior manager imposing standards on the staff. Sound familiar?

The head of HR stepped in and called a meeting of the bell staff to review the new requirements. He opened the meeting by tearing up the new standards (already had discussed with the resident manager). He then proceeded to “process” the group by discussing who their customers are, how they make most of their income, and what can they do to increase that income. Other points were made but these are some of the key ones.

As the group discussed these issues they “discovered” that they would like to make more money and the only way to do that is to increase their tips. Their customers are middle-aged guests who have children, some older, who the guest likes to see nicely groomed. Therefore, wouldn't the guest prefer to interact with a nicely groomed staff member and would that possibly increase the guest's willingness to tip? Answer from the bell staff team was yes.

The bell staff team developed tougher grooming standards, got complete commitment from the team, and improved the perception of service by the guests. Also, the resident manager achieved his goal and it went smoothly after a difficult start.

What's the moral of this story? You gain commitment and then accountability by involving the responsible parties in the development of operating standards. Further, when change is needed, the responsible parties must be involved if the changes are to be embraced and therefore successful. And finally, don't under-estimate the capabilities of your operating team. As we have seen in the last 18 months, they can and will rise to the occasion when they

understand the importance and the positive impact of doing things differently.

With this story completed, I want to turn back to the issues we have been confronting when discussing new standards and technology with operators. As noted, you achieve commitment based on involvement, whether asking a team to achieve standards or implement a new technological tool to improve business operations. Senior management cannot “impose” standards on an operation and expect them to be achieved. The operating team must understand how the standard can be met, and once shown that it can be, they will be prepared to be held accountable for that achievement. And it is this accountability that we are all seeking.

When it comes to new technology, again the team must understand the WHIIFM (What’s In It For Me). Will it help me achieve my goals, make my job easier, impact the staff and show positive results? If the operating team understands these issues and has an opportunity to properly test and use the system, they will get behind it. Even when an organization needs to expeditiously implement a new system, it must take the time to ensure everyone has gained an understanding of the systems and the WHIIFM.

With all this being said, it is clear that given the right motivation, clarity of need, and expected outcomes, an operating team can create substantive changes that create positive results. One just needs to recognize that they must be involved in the decision and be able to measure the impact of their efforts. All of this is critical in getting everyone to buy-in.

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