

Building Your Managerial Bench

Article Published November 2002, Services Magazine
Volume 22, Number 11

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I have worked with hundreds of executives. Whenever I have asked them about their ingredients for organization success, one factor always rises to the top: "Having good people, in particular, excellent managers. Sure, things like business development and good planning are important, but it is always our key people who have taken us to the next level."

One such key person is Frank Perez, RBSM, of Bridgeport, Connecticut based Service Management Group. Frank is 33 years old and has been in the business for 24 years. Frank started out as nine year old Frankie (the owners still call him that) helping his site supervisor father vacuum and pick up trash. At 16 he became a specialty crew leader with two floor people under him. And at 18, when site supervisors went on vacation, he would assume their role. By now the owners realized they had someone special.

Bob Weintraub, company President, reflected on how Frankie supervised others early on, "Frankie was a very hard worker. He would work side by side with the cleaners and took great pride in their work. I could go home and know that he would always follow through." For Frankie's on-going development Bob remarked, "over the years, we sent Frankie to many BSCAI technical courses on floor care, specialty products, bidding and job routing, to some management training and he eventually became RBSM certified. We also met with him almost daily to provide feedback on how we thought he was doing with his customers and staff. Frankie became an area manager at 20

and is now the V.P. of operations and we're fortunate to have him."

Frank is a rarity, beginning as a cleaner and moving up through the ranks. What the owners did was done intuitively, or by instinct, and mostly without any specific plan. In Frank's case it worked. Service Management recognized his potential and invested in him because in Bob Weintraub's words, "it's just smart business." He went on to say, "We got lucky with Frankie without having a formal development plan for him. I wouldn't take the chance of developing our key players that way again."

Smart Business

Similar to Service Management, developing *your* managerial bench is also smart business. You don't do it out of faith or humanity's good works, but as a necessary ingredient toward business success. Your ability to recreate yourself for some tasks or projects, and add new skills and abilities through competent people allows your business to thrive, and not be limited to what you directly touch.

And, even if equipped with this belief, how often have you said to yourself or remarked to others;

- "I would ask them to do it, but they are just not ready"
- "Why don't they get it, I've told them so many times"
- "I find myself getting involved where I know I really shouldn't, but if I don't..."

Most owner/executives or managers have said something like the above, more importantly, after they have said or thought it, what did they do about it? Do they simply go on to their next looming project, or have they considered changing the capabilities of those around them? Overcoming those barriers in a programmatic fashion is, in effect, developing the company's managerial bench.

Developing your bench is not an arbitrary or accidental pursuit. First, you need to adopt the mindset that nobody improves by sitting on the bench. But then how do you "effectively get them into the game?" You have to play them, giving them a chance to make their own decisions and if mistakes are the result, to learn from the experience as well as from those around them. Second, you have to make it clear what the technical, administrative, and behavioral expectations are for each managerial level, and provide training and practice in order to help managers meet them. What a site manager needs to excel at is different than an area or regional manager. But all site managers generally need to be good at the same things. They need to know safety, product use, job routing, budget tracking and possess a whole host of behavioral/interactional skills. (See Figure 1 Managerial Grid)

Grooming Managers

So once you're willing to play people and have established the managerial expectations, how do you or the company systematically go about growing them? The expectations need to be clearly communicated to those who are to meet them. Job descriptions are a start, yet only a start. No job description

could cover all the tacit expectations that a particular role requires. Regular face to face conversations with opportunities for further explanation and in-practice clarification helps managers know specifically what their bosses' will follow up on and hence, will definitely get done. The next step is in developing mechanisms to ensure that people have opportunities to master those expectations.

Training a manager for increased ability in their current role is one mechanism. Some companies establish formal curricula and identify a variety of venues where training can occur, while others, like the Service Management Group utilize training on an "as needed basis."

Paul Greenland, CBSE, Executive VP of Ohio located, Aetna Building Maintenance has taken the formalized route. "We not only wanted our managers to be better trained, but wanted to enact a culture change simultaneously. We set out on a two-year course, with senior executives as well as area managers learning the same techniques. We have begun to make the switch from an entrepreneurial focus to a more corporate model. We have pushed decisions down to the site level and have given full P&L responsibilities to our operations staff. For example, since the training, our special services division (industrial painting and urethane coatings) grew from 250K to 2 million. Prior to this training effort, we mostly did OJT. The formalization has helped."

Field Promotions

A second developmental mechanism entails identifying and helping transition managers to increased company responsibility. Assisting high

performing site managers become productive area managers, growing good area managers into regional ones, or moving a quality regional manager into a VP of operations role also strengthens your bench. Each company has its own criteria, whether formal or informal, to determine what qualities are necessary to "move up". Taylor Bruce, President of Greenville, South Carolina based IH Services says, "we look for people who are very good with customers, work hard, and are dedicated to the company, and most importantly, produce results." Bob Weintraub of Service Management also looks for managers with exceptional customer relations skills, but he adds another quality. "Every manager makes mistakes, that is to be expected. What we look for is a manager who is willing to admit their error without becoming defensive, and who looks to ensuring that the same mistake doesn't happen again by installing an alternative process or procedure."

The Ladder

Another dimension of assisting managers successfully assume additional responsibilities is in identifying the key transitions required to "move up."

Most attention is paid to the requirements of the new position, either through formal training or coaching from the boss, yet there are critical capabilities necessary which are not fully nor formally addressed. For example, a key transition from being a site manager to an area manager is running multiple job sites, geometrically increasing the numbers of staff, amount of supplies, number of customer interfaces, and individual site based budgets. Instead of primarily working with front line cleaners, now an area

| Role | | Technical | Administrative | Behavioral |
|------------------|----------------------------|---|---|--|
| Site Supervisor | K E Y | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chemical Safety - Floor Cleaning-stone, tile, wood - Equipment - Maintenance/utilization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budget Adherence - Labor Tracking - Site Hiring - Specific Task Training - Site Inspections | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Giving Feedback - Delegating Simple Tasks - Following-up on tasks - Receiving Customer Feedback |
| Area Manager | T R A N | | | |
| Regional Manager | S I T I | | | |
| Vice President | O N S | | | |

manager is working with managers. While most would agree that the ability to run multiple job sites is the key transition, little is typically done to assist new area managers deal with that fact. Taylor Bruce overcomes that by pairing an area manager with their replacement for a specified transition time so that the new area manager gets “real time assistance” from the person who knows the accounts and sometime previously made the transition themselves.

Another transition is the jump from area to regional manager. Perhaps their most important role change becomes managing electronically, via phone, e-mail, fax,... rather than being physically present. Giving direction from a remote location is a key transition, typically not

required by area managers, and is rarely addressed as a critical success factor. Cole Leitch, division V.P. for geographically diverse regions at Greensboro, North Carolina based Sunstates Maintenance solves the distance problem by relying mostly on electronic written communications and consistent phone conversations with each of his area managers. He states, “I focus mostly on written information from the area managers. I get a weekly report on labor tracking as well as a labor variance report. I also request the reasons for the variance should there be one. I require my managers to summarize, streamline, and have extreme degrees of quality and accuracy for their overall regional roll up. In addition, I have a consistent (rarely

changed) one half hour, regularly scheduled phone conversation with each area manager. If the call is over the half hour, it is because the written documentation is not complete. My area managers learn over time that more than a half hour call is not a good thing.” Cole has learned that his clearly stated area manager, written documentation and verbal interaction expectations has helped far-flung regions feel organizationally connected and increases the potential for their solid performance.

Cross Training

Job rotation is another vehicle helping develop managers. Taylor Bruce, of IH Services remarked, “When we find a site supervisor who is bright, clean cut, articulate, customer focused, and loyal to us, we will gradually send them to larger sites. In addition, we like to involve them in more bid situations, start-ups, and problem accounts. While our customers don’t like our moving their successful site managers, we speak before-hand with them, and get them to assist us in the transition for their replacement.” Regarding administrative skill development, “we financially train our people for P&L mastery, for both their own accounts and the overall company, and also have our HR staff train them on many personnel issues.”

Position rotation, formal and targeted administrative and technical training, OJT, and delivering performance feedback are mechanisms that Services Management, Aetna, and IH use for managerial development. Of the three key management development areas previously mentioned, technical training, administrative skills, and people skills, it is the interactional which are least attended to by BSC’s. Yet, it is

overwhelmingly the case that when the “people skills of management” are lacking, managers are most frequently career plateaued or derailed.

In an informal survey, BSC’s admitted to spending approximately 10% of their total management development time on the behavioral/interactional arenas, while spending 90% on the technical and administrative expectations. In addition, most of the 10% interactional development time is spent “remediating inappropriate behavior” rather than encouraging the positive and productive behaviors they want managers to manifest. Why is this? Part of the answer lies in the remarks of an area manager, “if the behavior of my site managers were easy to change, than I would have done so already.

In probing this area manager’s approach, I found that the steps he was taking to change manager behavior were more punitive than developmental, resorting to the credo, “How many times do I have to tell them, and they still don’t get it.”

This area manager hadn’t yet discovered the power of positive feedback. While participating in a site inspection, another area manager once remarked to me, “I like to catch my cleaners doing a task almost perfectly correct. That way I can give them a lot of positive encouragement, with a little bit of suggestion for improvement. They hear mostly the positive.” Whether developing managers or cleaners, observing someone doing something well is a terrific time to encourage that same behavior.

The other form of feedback is constructive criticism. All managers, all

executives, all people have blind spots regarding the way they come across to others. It is difficult to change a behavior that you don't know you demonstrate. One way to overcome these blind spots is to provide managers with valid, irrefutable data from a variety of perspectives; from their customers, direct reports, peer managers, and from their direct supervisor.

This approach is called a 360 degree assessment and gives managers behavioral/managerial feedback from a variety of constituencies, thus beginning their personal awareness process. But, awareness is only a first step. To get managers to really change their behavior, it is critical that they recognize the impact of their behavior on others, as well as what could they specifically be doing differently.

One such use of "boss and customer feedback"(of the constructive criticism variety) happened to an internal supplies distribution supervisor of a multi-state, Northwest company who too often had the wrong supplies, in the wrong amounts, delivered to the wrong accounts. She was repeatedly spoken to by her boss about her errors, yet until her boss talked about the downstream impact of cleaners not able to work, floors not able to be waxed, and accounts potentially lost it was only "her problem." By detailing the impact and making it a company and customer problem, the boss now had her interest. She spoke with several customers, asking, "what's your experience regarding supplies accuracy?", and if it wasn't adequate, what could I do differently?" Between the feedback from her customers' and from her boss, she initiated a more sophisticated supplies

distribution computer printout with a built in oversight system with the site managers. She implemented the system and now her error rate has diminished significantly, making for happier site managers, customers, and obviously her boss.

Sustaining Growth

Few BSC's use this 360 degree process in a developmental or remedial way. Companies cannot expect that OJT, position rotation, technical or administrative training, or managerial training "as needed" alone is sufficient to either fully assist people toward optimal success in their current roles, or help them make the jump into more responsible positions. Clearly, feedback from those working most closely with a manager can substantially assist their development.

In the rapidly expanding janitorial industry, developing your managerial bench to sustain business growth is clearly a strategic company imperative. Through a systematic effort beginning with clear managerial expectations, formalized, and targeted training, job rotation, emphasis on managerial behavior, identifying future growth candidates, and delivering ongoing performance feedback, BSC's can be confident that their managers are helping drive the company's success.