

# Start new year right by dumping these management myths

Got your new year's resolutions all set? Weight loss or exercise make that list more than any other resolutions, year in and year out. I hate to break it to you, but your business brain needs to lose some weight, too. You're carrying around some myths that are slowing you down just as much as those extra 10 pounds. Shed these myths in the new year and you're sure to get better results!

## 10. Focusing on the bottom line gets results.

Seems a little like me saying, "If I could just get my son to pay attention to the speedometer, I'm sure he would drive more safely." Yeah, right. Instead, managers need to concern themselves with the systems, processes, behaviors and beliefs that are producing that bottom line. Focusing on the right metrics will get better results than just focusing on the bottom line.

## 9. "Special issues" such as diversity and corporate social responsibility are best handled in a separate department since they aren't really part of "running the business."

Well, if you're sure they aren't part of running the business. But if that's the case, why are you spending valuable headcount and other resources on them?

Yes, you may need some dedicated resources, but if you think you can get the results you need (like a truly diverse workforce and an inclusive workplace) without also paying attention to these issues as part of "running the business," think again.

## 8. Data is what counts.

True, data is a vital part of decision-making. But it's not the whole story. First, the world is too complex for a spreadsheet to



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represent reality. Check out what Daniel Pink says in his book, "A Whole New Mind." And second, check with your multicultural workforce as to what counts as "data." In some cultures, a story is considered a more valid way of knowing than a string of facts.

## 7. A manager's job is to control the organization.

Seriously? If you still think you can control any human system, then I'm guessing you haven't raised a teenager. You can influence people and organizations but you can't control them. When you accept that influence is the best card you've got, you can use your influence to nudge the organization in the right direction.

## 6. If I reveal a weakness, it will make me look weak.

Seems to make sense. But the counter-intuitive truth is that your greatest strength as a leader is in your authenticity — who you are, weaknesses included. By being open about your shortcomings, you will be a stronger, more authentic leader and you'll have greater influence over others.

## 5. I haven't confronted any ethical challenges.

The chief operating officer of a Fortune 100 company made this statement to a live audience recently. And the worst part is that I think he meant it. His company had experienced layoffs, outsourcing, critical supplier decisions and the dozens of other management challenges faced by a big company.

Yet he didn't see any ethical challenges in all of that? If you can't see the ethical dilemmas inherent in your management decisions, it's likely that you're not paying attention to the conflicting needs of your many stakeholders. And that's not just bad ethics; it's bad business.

## 4. Answers are more important than questions.

Answers make us feel secure. They allow us our illusion of certainty. And that's why they're dangerous. You can learn a lot with a well-thought-out question. But if you already think you have all the answers you need, you may be running head first into a brick wall. Develop your ability to ask the right questions in the right way and you'll be light years ahead.

## 3. Behaviors trump beliefs.

Managers are often taught that their job is to coach employees into the right behaviors. Sometimes that works. The employee just didn't have the right knowledge or skills to do the task. You coach her and things get better. But sometimes it's not that simple. The reason things aren't being done right could be the employee's beliefs about her job, the rewards, her clients or a dozen other things. Real leadership means getting beyond behaviors to the beliefs that cause the behaviors.

## 2. You have to be "nice" giving feedback; you can't just say what you think.

If I could wave my magic wand and remove the need to be "nice" from managers everywhere, organizations would instantly be more productive and satisfying places to work.

We need honest, direct, useful, clear feedback. When we get that, we trust management more, we have the tools to improve our performance, we feel better about our work. Don't get me wrong — I'm not advocating that you be abusive or brutal or rude in your feedback. But say what

you have to say in a straightforward way.

## 1. When we're through implementing this change, things will stabilize.

This is the whopper of myths. Change isn't something that happens and then ends. It's just the way things are. As soon as you implement what you have planned, something else will need to change.

And perpetual change is much easier to handle if you think of that as the normal state of affairs than if you keep telling yourself that someday "it will be over."

Start 2007 right by shedding the unnecessary weight of these myths today. And while you're at it, make sure the rest of your organization drops these unwanted pounds, too.

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