

# “Milk Carton” Mis-Management

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It arrives in the mailbox. It arrives as a newspaper insert. It is often seen on mega-size billboards. It is seen on milk cartons. “It” is the announcement of a missing child. “It” is a description and photo of a missing adult. “It” has been and is presently a way of directing attention or focus on these traumatic separations.....the losses of loved ones.....milk carton announcements of missing persons.

Possibly four, six or more years has passed since “milk carton” announcements have been introduced and utilized in the United States. Has the novelty of this “gunshot” approach become mundane = just perceived as an everyday occurrence? How about the handling of this information; does “it” move from mailbox insert directly to the wastepaper basket? Has the sought after impact been blunted by adaptation?

Relationships between manager and staff member can migrate (mis-management) to a state of adaptation. Associates’ relationships can become blunted and dulled through “everyday is the same old day” adaptation. Could it be indifference and assumed constantly in customer—salesperson relationships (mis-management) end up with the loss of a valued customer?

Initial attention can turn into assumptions that relationships will ALWAYS be there and will ALWAYS remain vibrant and ,as usual , vital to both sides of the communication loop. Adaptation and these assumptions are “relationship-killers”! The waning of attention is a cause and culprit of discomfort & distress producing distancing in the relationship. The “d” in adaptation = destructive downward spiral of separation between boss and staff members.

Mis-management is reflected in the leadership looking glass as the psychological space or gap in the need for understanding.. Dr. Ralph Nichols stated, “ The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and to be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them.” Could it be that the process of adaptation between management and employees, between a supervisor and a staff member, transition the initial contact-of-understanding to a subsequent relationship of indifference( psychological distance-space)?

The opposite of LOVE is not HATE.....the opposite of LOVE is INDIFFERENCE.

There is the FALSE assumption that once there is a bridge of understanding between persons, that bridge will always remain the same, will always be strong, will always sustain and maintain the bonding. A salient point to remember is that “ assumptions can land you on your feet or on your seat.” The reality of leadership and living is that through time the understanding between boss and staff change.



The need to be understood is the constant. Understandings of the new expectations between boss and an Associate are the variables. Performance bridge building and interpersonal bonding deteriorate as these understandings become confused or are lost.

Dr. Nichols wrote about communication understanding. He also focused on the need to be understood. Employee Associates have an ongoing, and possibly an ever increasing need to express their personal and occupational needs( the need to be understood by their management and peers). Often found in organizations is the employee need to PROJECT this need to be heard...

- Please listen to me as I am so trying to be heard
- Please notice I am changing as situations have changed
- Please be aware that I have new expectations
- Please pay attention to my emerging needs = my new needs
- Please pay attention, again , to me as a person & my ideas
- Please renew and revitalize US.....please care by 'hearing me'
- Please do not toss me aside like a milk carton missing person

There is another need that many times cries out from staff members. That need is to PROTECT. Protection from what....protection from whom? As some staff persons slowly move to the arena of being disenfranchised, there is the possibility of them seeing themselves as becoming an object....an object of hurt, hassle and heartache. No person wants the harm and headaches which can be inflicted upon those who might have fallen by the political wayside. So, when some employees sense they are slowly becoming 'milk carton lost organizational souls', the need for PROTECTION can come to the forefront.

Such self protection behaviors are seen as defensiveness.....the need to defend their egos and remaining organization turfs. I call organizational turf protection = "Domain Poisoning". Defensiveness is simply two words; De---Fence or putting a protecting fence around ones self regard/self image which is in danger of being hurt.

### **Antidotes To The Poison Of Indifference**

Mis-management is just that.....missing (1) the disease of creeping adaptation which can settle in to manager-employee relations wherein employees are taken for granted and assumed to remain constant in needs, wants, wishes and (2) missing a bet on longer tenured employees who have evolved new interests ( let us call these 'motivational release buttons') as well as evolved new competencies.

#1: Diagnosis (Dx) must precede intervention (Rx). Surely INVESTING time in your staff Associates, rather than just SPENDING time or PASSING time with them, is vital to keeping the relationships fresh and contemporary. Management is NOT a ritual or just a routine ( being artificial and not authentic).



Walk and talk, ask and listen, to your staff persons on an individual basis. What is he/she NOT saying to you, as well? How are her dreams/dreads changing? How is he changing in his perceptions and goals....where and how is he BECOMING different? Simply, stay close !!

The antidote to the poison of “slow death’ adaptation is regularly revitalizing the relationship with EACH person by visiting and revisiting “where he and she are now” & what they want to talk about ( their wants, wishes, whims, ideas for change, worries, rumors, etc.) Come to them and go to their work station; a Manager’s office and being behind a Manager’s desk are dangerous places, ineffective places, from which to relate to staff Associates. Just maybe after such regular Dx, changes are possible for the welfare of BOTH the individual and the organization.

#2: Long tenured employees need not become milk carton ,burnt-out discards resting in a state of O.J.R. = on the job retirement! What a real waste of talent, what a real loss of human capability, what a terrible loss of contributing productivity and what a terrible psychological pain for these human beings. Might I also add, what psychological pain also spreads to their family-spousal lives.

A “magical management” 7 highlighted pointers? There are 7 days in a week. There are 7 rungs or levels of perfection. There were 7 wonders of the ancient world. Buddha had 7 emblems. Ancient Thebes had 7 gates. There are 7 major planets.

Here are 7 prescriptions, proactive management interventions to prevent or minimize the losses and pains pointed out in the paragraph above:

- Focus on Associate’s strengths, skills and wisdom developed by experience and new learning
- Interpersonally build people up. It takes no managerial talent to tear people down. Remind people who they ARE, rather than reminding people whom they ARE NOT.
- Recognize and reward accomplishments, actions which involved even some modest taking of risk that produced achievement
- Enrichment and empowerment, that is, encouraging employees to proactively participate in planning and teaming of decisions
- Examine what is asked and expected from each person’s position. What tasks are antiquated, no longer needed, have become so routine that they could be done by a machine, or, not done at all.



- What different tasks could be added into a person's position that would match their curiosity, interests and new talents-education? Revitalization of Associates starts with rethinking and revitalizing what management asks of them.
- Honor the uniqueness of each Associate, respect the differences & diversity among and between Associates, search out how each individual wishes to be UTILIZED. Every person wants to be UTILIZED, but no one wants to be USED! Management is NOT manipulation, but rather the skill & sensitivity to release motivation.

Finally, always the expression of "Thank You " = remembering & caring !

