

# MANAGERS' DEMANDS MUST CHANGE WITH GROWTH

By Aldonna R. Ambler, CMC, CSP, The Growth Strategist™

Companies that are growing very fast necessarily place high demand on their employees. On the one hand it is very exciting: an employee has an opportunity to learn how to advance, try new things, have real responsibilities, and feel needed. On the other hand, it can be over-whelming: the owners or managers of a growing company can seem picky and demanding. The skills workers need to develop seem endless. Some very capable employees can shut down or freeze under the pressure. Support personnel are asked to redo or rewrite their assignments more often in a growing company because things change faster. This leaves managers looking indecisive or moody.

There are a number of responses available to managers in this situation. One typical response is to become increasingly annoyed with support staff. The managers begin to get very specific about what time they want people to arrive in the morning and leave at night. Managers express their disgust that employees don't care, as the managers must pick up the slack and work harder and harder to meet tightening deadlines. They begin to resent that the staff doesn't seem to have a sense of urgency about its work and doesn't want to help during key times.

What should you do when your staff doesn't seem to care at a time when your company needs it the most?

When a company faces this dilemma, it is important for the front-line managers to break the spiraling cycle that is beginning. To take the initiative, a manager can follow these steps:

- People are different. The managers need to recognize that the staff behind them is not one homogenous group; each member has his/her unique strengths and weaknesses. At first this sounds obvious, but when the spiraling behavior starts to happen the staff seems to act as a large unit. Individual strengths and weaknesses seem to blur together into group behavior.
- Identify. Select three staff people who show promise and would be worth the manager's time to develop and list each person's assets.
- Recognize individual strength. Review the lists of strengths to make sure they aren't identical. Some managers have to work at recognizing individual strengths.
- List of weaknesses. List the areas of vulnerability and poor performance for each of the three individuals.
- Review areas of further development. Review each list of areas of further development to make sure that the three lists are different and individual uniqueness has been recognized.
- Reflect on behavior. The manager needs to reflect on his/her own behavior in response to the employees and see whether there are any of the employees' strengths that have not been affirmed lately. Compliments could improve productivity.
- Reflect on employee strengths. Is there some portion of the work that could be emphasized, discussed, or modified in a way that could bring out the employee's strengths more distinctly? For example, some employees' ability to write can be markedly improved by providing more information about the purpose of the writing assignment, or how their part contributes to the whole.
- Select areas of improvement. Select which one skill area, if improved, could make the biggest difference in that employee's contribution to the business and his/her future career.
- Employee list of attributes. It is important for managers and employees alike to select the most significant skills to develop for the benefit of the company and the individuals involved.

Managers are often surprised that employees will select skills to be developed that would be

helpful to the firm, but are not the same skills the manager had identified as being the most important at this time.

A manager client of ours recently went through these steps. He initiated a discussion with an employee and was temporarily concerned that the employee wanted to develop his computer literacy, while the manager wanted the employee to develop more positive communication. This manager was smart enough to accept the employee's selection of computer literacy. He also asked whether there was another skill the employee would have to work on to gain upper management's confidence and willingness to invest in the employee's increased computer literacy. The conversation easily shifted to a discussion of how the employee is perceived and how his style of communication may be holding back his development.

Use of this sequence is helpful for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that the manager breaks his/her negative-thinking cycle. He/she demonstrates to the employee that he/she is thinking about the other person, can see the positive strengths, is willing to look at himself as well as the employee, and wants to contribute to the employee's future development. It's also excellent in that there are benefits to both the employee and the company. If the employee improves his/her communication patterns the company would be getting fewer distractions, more productivity, more profits, and the employee would be advancing his career. This type of discussion is much more constructive than a talk about company policies, procedures, and deadlines.

The manager can look at his/her communication with employees like a salesperson looks at a prospective customer. An employee needs to buy into what a company is doing and, just like a customer, there needs to be some benefit to him/her. Good salespeople know not to ticket a client about missed appointments or lack of follow-through when the sale hasn't been closed.

Once a manager and staff person have discussed the points listed above, they need to identify the things they need to do together to accomplish success. An employee who skips

steps, procrastinates, doesn't seem to listen, isn't organized, and seems irresponsible may need some help understanding the purpose of his/her work, the future application of the work, the logic behind it, and what's needed to achieve it. Many people were never taught sequential thinking and it may need day-to-day reinforcement.

Another staff person who seems to lack enthusiasm, doesn't seem to recognize the urgency of assignments, and won't take initiative may be having a difficult time visualizing success. This person can get lost in individual problems and have a difficult time spotting opportunity or alternative approaches. A manager can help this individual by reinforcing the goal and helping the employee generate alternatives when problems do occur. This technique of selecting one area of development for an employee's focus for a short time is helpful to both manager and employee. Each can see progress. The gap between management and staff shrinks.

The greatest gift a manager can give an employee during periods of accelerated growth and high demands is recognition of his/her individuality and some sign that the company success will be shared with all who contribute to it.

*Known as **The Growth Strategist™**, Aldonna R. Ambler, CMC, CSP helps professional service firms, technology-driven businesses, and construction-related product/service for distribution companies reach their goal of **Achieving Accelerated Growth With Sustained Profitability®** through a combination of speaking, consulting, executive coaching, authorship, and growth financing. She has executed an ESOP, grown multiple international businesses, won multiple awards, provided expert testimony on economic growth at over 30 legislative hearings, conferred with Presidents in the Oval Office, has written over 100 articles and plans to publish "Four Entrepreneurial Styles" this fall. Aldonna was named the **national (USA) "Woman Business Owner of the Year"** and one of **NJ's Best 50 Women in Business**. She currently hosts a weekly Internet radio show, **The Growth Strategist™** on VoiceAmerica® Business ([www.business.voiceamerica.com](http://www.business.voiceamerica.com)) every Tuesday at 11 a.m. ET. Aldonna Ambler can be reached at [Aldonna@AMBLER.com](mailto:Aldonna@AMBLER.com), 1-888-ALDONNA (253-6662) or at [www.TheGrowthStrategist.com](http://www.TheGrowthStrategist.com).*

