

## **Looking for Buy-in? Give Your Employees a Chance**

*Managers everywhere want their employees to buy into plans for the company's future. Be ready for a surprise if you give them the chance to speak up - they may not say what you want to hear!*

Buy-in is the point where employees willingly go along with proposed changes. To get there, people have to work through the options and weigh up the consequences before agreeing with a decision. If you cut that process short, you most often will increase employees' resistance; the opposite effect of your intention.

Resistance – or push-back – comes from unmet needs, whether conscious or unconscious. And it can be a blessing. In developing plans for the company, you may have overlooked some important aspect of the situation and the resistance of people around you can provide a clue that you've overlooked or misread something. This is especially true if the push-back is coming from the people you respect for their expertise or experience.

If you don't allow time for opposing comments, or belittle employees when they do speak, their feedback will soon dry up. Once others see a fellow worker being treated disrespectfully for offering contrary opinions, they are far less likely to offer their real thoughts and feelings, and the silence grows.

The kinds of things that shut down employee input include bosses who show by example that avoidance is the way of life in the company; co-workers who obviously distance themselves from people who speak out, and a company attitude that treats a difference of opinion as if it were disloyalty. It is not only teenagers who cave into peer pressure to conform.

The danger is that the flip side of opposition is not harmony, but apathy – a loss of interest or concern. Go there and you've lost the creativity, commitment and enthusiasm that could have set your company apart from the competition.

To allow different ideas to surface, and spark productivity and innovation, requires that managers have the knowledge and skill to focus on issues rather than personalities, and draw out employees underlying concerns rather than getting trapped in fixed positions. Focus on keeping an open mind, tell the truth, and make yourself accessible to all employees.

People do not have to like a decision to cooperate with it. Too often managers think they have to “spin” the explanation so that people will want to go along with it. In fact, in order to accept a management decision, people first need to understand how it was made. They need to see and agree that the decision-making process is fair, and they need to understand what is expected of them from then onward.

This is not the same thing as consensus decision-making, or compromise for its own sake. It is not possible to accommodate every opinion, need or interest in the workplace. Instead, this is letting the worth of the ideas themselves determine the final decision.

Finally, the rewards and recognitions your company puts in place must match up with the changes stemming from the decision; employees must receive appropriate training to handle new responsibilities, and managers must “walk the talk” of any changes required.

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