

Mission Ready

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Bias Your Employees Towards Victory

Despite the smiling, confident faces that may greet you every morning on the job, there is often an undercurrent of defeatism in the workplace, which is difficult to detect, much less to cure. But it is a fact of working life that the attitude of our employees, during the day, is not much different than their attitude away from the job. And *that* attitude may not be particularly hopeful. To be an effective manager is to realize that not all of our subordinates expect to win; indeed, many of them expect to lose.

There are any number of reasons why employees come to expect to lose on the job. Many of your subordinates may have come from an environment where failure was a way of life; they may look upon winning as something that happens to other, luckier, people like the class star, not themselves. Some of your employees have a lopsided, uninformed view, of the market within which they compete. They may have an exaggerated concept of your competitor - especially if your competitor is a very large organization. They look about at their fellow employees and simply cannot imagine them winning over the workforce they *imagine* to be so dominant.

Many employees pay an inordinate amount of attention to rumor - both within the industry and within the organization. Rumor, of course, is rarely about anything positive. Whispers about upcoming layoffs, or lost contracts, or angry customers, hardly make for a robust winning attitude. Employees may also be accustomed to failure because their company, before *you* arrived as the new manager, routinely lost a lot of business.

Another much more subtle predisposition for failure is, quite simply, envy. There will always be those in the organization who are not displeased to see their own company lose a big order. Such individuals may resent the success of a peer, or of a rising star, and be secretly gratified that "he wasn't able to pull it off, this time." Managers who think such individuals do not exist in their

departments are fooling themselves.

Whatever the reason, a losing attitude must be replaced by a winning one. As managers, we can bias our people to see victory rather than defeat, by always insisting on *every* challenge being overcome - not nine out of ten, but all ten. We can create a workplace culture that is better than the culture outside the walls of the company, by letting our people know that victory is expected of them - by one's associates, one's family, even one's community.

As managers, we must go out of our way to remind our people of the *successful* history of the organization. "War stories" should be shared with all; successful teams must be highlighted in newsletters and awards ceremonies; every single triumph within the company should be trumpeted.

If it's the size of the competition that seems to strike fear in the heart of our associates, we must point out the liabilities of being a Goliath. A huge competitor, for example, also has a huge bureaucracy, which can slow the decision-making process. The larger company may not fight as hard for a piece of business that we *must* have. The Goliath may not be as experienced in our particular niche; he may also lack the relationships we have carefully cultivated with our customers. And the giant may not be willing to do the necessary "handholding" after the sale.

But certainly the most important factor in predisposing our personnel towards victory is morale. A company with unbeatable morale will take the occasional set back with equanimity, and focus on the long-term mission of success within the marketplace. Every manager can build unbeatable morale to the degree to which one's own career is subjugated to the career of each individual under one's authority.