

Managing the boomerang effect

The reality of our troubled economy has hit. This has changed the playing field from where employees were in demand to where employment security and jobs are at risk. With this fear comes a psychology that motivates employees to stay with employers regardless of their current satisfaction level.

More employees come to work fearful. Fear is real or perceived and not always logical. It's of value for leaders to be respectful of this, because employees will remember how they were treated in both good and bad economies.

There's a phenomenon that occurs in the employee-employer relationship where both parties keep a mental scorecard of each other's performance that ultimately defines each other's perception of value.

Human behaviour is influenced by reciprocity, which can be simply explained that when one person does something for another, when they want something in return they expect it will be done. If not, they will be less likely to do something for the person in the future. In an employee-employer relationship, reciprocity influences how both parties define their mental scorecard.

One simple example of the influence of the mental scorecard: Jill believes she has done 98 activities well, some above and beyond the call of duty and perhaps two on the surface appear to be questionable. These two activities create the cyclone of doubt. I call this the 98-2 theory. The two per cent becomes the 98 per cent and ends up defining the employee's value. This can damage Jill's mental scorecard and commitment to her employer.

The boomerang effect can be both positive and negative. Leaders who are aware of the boomerang effect are much more committed to decreasing employee fear and don't abuse their position of authority in stressful times. They understand employees will remember and what they give out likely will come back in one form or another.

Influencing Human Behaviour

- Influencing human behaviour often comes down to two approaches: the stick or carrot. Stick leaders use fear, assumptions and pettiness in an attempt to gain compliance, all of which build long-term resentment. They talk at employees with the belief there's only one side: theirs. Carrot leaders, however, remove fear, take a safe, open approach and talk with employees to understand their position. They avoid damaging the mental scorecard by shooting first and asking questions later.



- Economic reality has set in and it can decrease hope and increase employee stress. Employees will benefit and be less fearful when they have accurate and truthful communications so that rumours and assumptions don't increase fear. This helps facilitate productivity and coping with stress.
- Discuss your mental scorecard with your employees; don't assume you know the score or avoid discussions. Engage employees and be clear on what they feel they have done that deserves recognition and be willing to at least say thank you and change what's appropriate to change.
- Pay attention to reciprocity; it's a powerful motivator. What one gives out one will get back in one form or another. Leaders must know that if they set a standard for their employees they will be held to the same or higher standard.
- Be aware of employee rights; there are lots of moving parts these days, both in employee and labour law.
- Every leader has a blind spot and if not discovered may result in a negative boomerang.

Employees who trust and respect their leaders will be more open and approachable for both good news and bad. Leaders who prove they care and are committed seldom feel a negative boomerang; more often they enjoy positive ones.

