Command Less, Care More



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"What does it take to thrive and to do genuinely good, human-centered work in a human world of individuals who have failings, foibles, and doubts, a world of social relationships that range from strong to awkward to awful? The answer is flexibility *plus* a sense of responsibility, accountability and commitment—*it takes care*." – Mark Addleson

This week I've been re-reading Mark Addleson's thought provoking book, *Beyond Management*. The book is unlike anything I've ever read about managing people, projects, and organizations. A central theme is that too many leaders cling to the language and practices of the industrial era, rather than adapting management to suit today's work environment and today's staff. Nonprofit organizations aren't factories, they are places where knowledge and commitment come together to change lives, and where challenging social problems are tackled with finesse.

In particular I've been drawn to Chapter 9, *Practices that break the mold with agility and care*. In this chapter, Addleson dares the reader to dispense with the traditional approach to project development: "laying out all your requirements at the start, so you know what you have to do and can see the way ahead." He calls this approach a "sham" that ignores the human factor that is "overwhelmingly important in knowledge-work." At the heart of this chapter is a message about the need for practical caring in the workplace; to foster candid conversations, build trust, and support the agility that all organizations need to survive and thrive in a world of uncertainty.

Addleson's view is that before the industrial age, work was based on relationships and that factories ushered in the demarcation between "home life" and "work life." When responsibility for virtually everything about work shifted to the management hierarchy, workers were left without anything or anyone to care about in the workplace. Although our economy has changed dramatically since that time, vestiges of factory management remain—even in our kinder and gentler nonprofit sector.

Beyond Management reminded me of some of the countless mistakes I made as a young manager. For many years, my style was to greet co-workers with a polite "good morning" and then head straight to my office. I avoided water cooler conversations about spouses, children, favorite sports teams, seasonal allergies and the like, believing that it was possible to earn respect as a leader without feigning any interest in the personal lives of the people I depended on to get my work done. I judged the commitment of subordinates on their willingness

to arrive early and stay late.

Addleson explains that a hierarchical, 'command and control' management style creates a *disincentive* to commitment. An unyielding, high-control hierarchy with rote requirements not only saps the enthusiasm from nonprofit knowledge workers, but it puts the mission, strategies and even precious clientele at undue risk. What's the solution to inspiring true commitment in your nonprofit workplace? Addleson invites us to try "practical caring."

In *Beyond Management* I learned that the four dimensions of practical care are:

1. Mutual trust
2. Active empathy
3. Access to help, and
4. Lenient judgment

The four dimensions of practical care are more than an interesting sidebar. I believe that they offer a path to inspiring the dedication and commitment to a nonprofit mission as well as risk management practice. Gaining the trust of a co-worker doesn't happen without caring about that colleague's well-being. It is absurd to expect a fellow employee to rush to your rescue when you haven't shown your willingness to do the same. And when we judge others harshly, we quickly erode the other elements of practical caring.

I sincerely hope that readers of this *Risk ENews* don't take as long as I did to learn that sincere caring for co-workers, subordinates and superiors is the best way to inspire commitment to a nonprofit mission. You can't command your colleagues to care, but by caring yourself, you can captivate them.

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