

Honor your organization's unsung heroes

Every February, the American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (AMCHAM) celebrates the "Honor Your Staff Day." It used to be "Honor Your Secretary Day." Top executives bring their secretaries, executive assistants, or other key staff to the luncheon meeting devoted to giving praises to outstanding support staff. This is a simple motivational practice that goes a long way, perhaps much more than a five percent annual pay increase in salary, less taxes.

Unsung heroes

Organizations all over the world have a system of valuing jobs. The managers and highly technical positions are at the uppermost parts of the organization's totem pole. The rank and file and support staff positions are usually at the bottom. This is customary, as job evaluation systems measure the value contribution of the jobs and arrange them in a hierarchy. The higher the position is in the totem pole, the higher the pay for the position. Of course, progressive compensation systems allow for paying also for the

performance, the person, and the potential. But, the intrinsic value of the job, regardless of the jobholder, is the basis for the pay for the position. A clerk with a MBA degree will have a lower base pay than a Technical Supervisor who has not completed his college education.

In every organization all over the world, support staff members are one of the most under appreciated, if not unappreciated, groups. Yet, they perform a vital role in running a successful business. In a Mom and Pop organization, the owner is usually the Manager. The rest are support staff whose job descriptions practically read, ".... To perform such other tasks as may be assigned from time to time..."

Leadership

This could be a misgiving on my part. But, as a human resources (HR) practitioner, I have long stopped believing that "people per se are the most valuable assets of an organization." To me, it is leadership. The success and continuity of any organization - business, non-profit, government, non-government organization



ASK YOUR CAREER COUNSELOR

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(NGO), etc. - practically depend on LEADERSHIP.

Good leadership is vital for developing a positive organizational culture that breeds success. The organization's leader creates the vision for the whole organization by taking a snapshot of the future that he or she wants. Then the leader creates a buy-in (or ownership) of that vision, so that all the people can be rallied to work together into making that vision a reality.

But what exactly makes for effective leadership? The most important thing for any leader is to understand that leaders

alone cannot make the vision a reality. The job of a leader is to inspire his people so that everybody moves toward the same future. The leader must understand the importance of the organization's support staff.

Sidekicks

Even superheroes or extraordinary people whose rare feats we honor today rely on support staff in order to succeed in saving the world.

On May 29, 1953, Sir Edmund Percival Hillary, a New Zealand mountaineer, explorer and philanthropist, became the first man to have reached the summit of Mount Everest. He was not alone. He had a Nepalese Sherpa mountaineer, Tenzing Norgay, as his guide. Hillary and Norgay were part of the ninth British expedition to Mount Everest, led by John Hunt, with a party of some 300 people at various stages of the slope leading to the summit, and at several base camps below.

On May 20-21, 1927, Charles Lindbergh flew the Spirit of St. Louis (Registration: N-X-211), a custom-built, single engine, single-seat monoplane. The feat was the first solo trans-Atlantic

*VALUES
*LEADERSHIP

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flight from Long Island, New York to Paris, France. It earned Lindbergh the \$25,000 Orteig Prize and a place in world history. It took Lindbergh 33 hours, 30 minutes to cover 3,600 miles. The plane was built by Ryan Airlines in San Diego, California, and the flight project was supported by several businessmen. While Lindbergh flew solo, he was never alone in the endeavor.

The importance of staff support cannot be overemphasized. Even your favorite Superheroes have sidekicks. Superman has Jimmy Olsen, Superboy and Krypto. The Green Lantern has Pieface. Batman has Robin (Dick Grayson), and don't forget Alfred the butler. Batwoman has Batgirl, the Owlman has Talon, and Deadpool has Bob. Captain America has Bucky and Falcon, Wolverine has Jubilee, and the Incredible Hulk has Rick Jones. Seriously, without Wernher Von Braun and the hundreds of NASA scientists of the Apollo program, Neil Armstrong would not have taken "one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind."

Completed staff work
in the profession of



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management, there is a principle known as "completed staff work." It means that subordinates are responsible for "submitting written recommendations to superiors in such a manner that the superior need do nothing further in the process than review the submitted document and indicate approval or disapproval." The job of a manager is to get things done through other people. (It sounds like patriotism is letting others die for your country.)

In completed staff work, the subordinate must identify the problem, issue or concern that requires a decision by some higher authority. The subordinate does the research, fact-finding, and analysis. He has not done his job until he has made a recommendation on the alternative courses of action that the manager should take.

This concept is of military origin. James Webb, Director of the Bureau of the Budget (1946-1949), attributes the Doctrine of Completed Staff Work to President Harry S. Truman. However, a memo written and circulated by Brigadier General George A.

Rehm, executive officer for the G-3, Operations section, attributes the policy to General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters during World War II.

Value of the support staff

In order to understand the true value of a company's support staff, look at the company's frontline staff - receptionist, security guard, contact center agent, etc. They're usually the first contact that a potential customer will meet. Perhaps, the frontline staff members don't realize the great intrinsic value of the perfunctory daily routine of their jobs. Like it or not, these support staff members create and shape the customer experience. Unbeknownst to them, whether or not the customer would come back in the future is in their hands, or tongues.

Leaders must ensure that the support staff members understand the importance of their job, and make them feel proud about their contribution, no matter how small compared to the magnitude of the organization's vision and mission. (email: erniececilia@gmail.com)