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Is Fear Common in Organizations?

Yes! And the waste due to fear is enormous. But since the cost of fear doesn't appear on Financial Statements, fear doesn't get Management's prompt attention.

No Total Quality initiative can succeed if fear is present. Fear is a hidden force that reduces productivity, sabotages quality, and is a barrier to improvement.

Fear of failure, fear of supervisors, fear of voicing an opinion, and fear of change are the chief enemies of timely action and flexibility.

In a recent survey, employees identified the following reasons why employees don't speak up, or don't participate in quality improvement efforts:

- "There's no one I can talk to,"
- "Nothing will happen anyway,"
- "Some supervisors like the status quo,"
- "Past experience says this is just a fad,"
- "My supervisor just doesn't listen,"
- "I'll get threatened with termination,"
- "My foreman doesn't like to hear bad things about our department,"
- "The boss has a bad temper."

How To Recognize Fear

- Low scores on employee attitude surveys
- Few employee suggestions
- Chronic lack of questions at meetings
- Multiple approval signatures on P.O.'s
- Extensive dress rehearsals for internal Management presentations
- Memos that justify actions
- Padded estimates
- Absence of teamwork

How To Reduce Fear

Open channels for two-way communication. Managers can conduct weekly meetings with employees to give them a chance to air their concerns, and Managers get a chance to respond and earn respect. Managers need to seek employees' views and must never threaten or belittle employees.

Recognize good performance. This increases individuals' confidence, makes work fulfilling, and instills a willingness to act decisively and start new endeavours. The more spontaneous and public the recognition, the better its effect.

Be accessible. To have Management walk around has a positive effect on morale. Listening while walking around provides a source of invaluable information from the grass roots.

Provide dual checks. Appeal procedures for decisions are powerful forces in creating a freer communication climate.

Create an open-door policy. Company policies should highlight respect for employees, and must be a reality, not just a slogan.

Manage necessary quotas. Poorly managed quotas instill fear because employees believe they're working in a hostile environment. Quotas should accompany a mind-set of openness, customer satisfaction, and common sense.

Define roles and responsibilities. Once employees know their operating boundaries, they will feel secure in acting within those boundaries. With empowerment, boundaries will enlarge as will employees' performance.

Eliminate rumours. Meetings where anonymously submitted questions are answered can be a great vehicle for dispelling rumours.

Instill a sense of family. Help employees feel like they belong to a group of people, not just a functional organization, by establishing common eating areas (i.e., eliminating the executive dining room), sponsoring social events, participation in athletic activities, discussion groups, celebrating successes together, etc.

Provide training. When people know what to do, and how to do it, they perform better.

It's up to Management to eliminate barriers and create an environment in which employees can do their best. Removing fear will give employees confidence to act decisively, experiment, and improve.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM ALL THE STAFF AT PQA