

ORIGINAL DOCUMENT: Article for Business Journal

Are You “Annoying” Your Employees And Is This Costing You?

Here’s an interesting research finding. According to the consulting firm BambooHR, “80% of 30-44 year olds found it to be ‘considerably annoying’ when their boss doesn’t trust or empower them.” Not just “annoying” but “considerably annoying”. If the respondents had at least a Bachelors degree the annoyance factor was 89%. Do you have any 30-44 year olds in your organization? Are you doing all you can to empower these valuable members of your team so you can get the most out of them while at the same time ensuring that they are contributing to your organization efforts and they are growing professionally?

Sadly, in most of the organizations the answer is “no”. And here’s the other problem, even if an organization wants to empower their team they’re unlikely to have a clear plan for doing so.

One of the ways people can gain a sense of empowerment at work is to make the decisions that are key to their jobs. People who make decisions and live with the consequences of these decisions feel empowered and they contribute more.

However, unless you’re fortunate enough to own your own company or have advanced up the organization chart many of the people in the 30-44 year old demographic are middle managers or even entry level people who do not typically have the opportunity to advocate for and make the decisions that are essential to their jobs. Many don’t even know how critical organizational decisions are made. It’s an opaque process to them and only fuels their frustration.

People don't feel they can talk candidly about power and decision-making. These topics are too threatening to discuss. People fear they will lose their jobs if they bring these topics up. They don't want to be seen as "power hungry". So in the face of a clear way to resolve this discomfort ineffective organizational decision-making cultures persist and employers miss the opportunity to engage their staff and to make the most out of their decision-making abilities. We establish and maintain decision-making cultures that are ineffective and hold organizations back.

So why do we do this? Two prominent reasons come to mind. Fear of failure and bias are reasons that contribute to ineffective decision-making cultures. Let's take each in turn.

While fear of failure can exist in any organization it is particularly common in small business and in non-profits that do not feel they have the financial resources to persist in the face of a decision-making calamity. Organizations with limited resources often tighten the reins of decision-making. Their reasoning is that they can't take the risk of expanding the number of people who are making key organizational decisions. It's too risky. What if something happens? This is a shortsighted perspective. The 30-44 year olds in your organization want to take on additional responsibility and will do so if they're offered a chance. If you get over your fear, you'll be able to fully utilize their abilities.

But people also have bias and this bias affects who we think should make decisions in our organizations. In our society bias is a difficult topic to bring up. But just because its difficult to address doesn't mean that it's not present. Here are a few for you to consider. Perhaps you went to an elite school and are only willing to entrust decision-making to those with a similar background. Or you think that men with seniority should be making all of the decisions. Or

people who are part of the demographic that is served by your organization should be making the decisions. Going back to our original question, do you think that people who are 30-44 years old have the experience to be making the decisions that are key to their jobs? Despite our efforts to eliminate our biases they all can play a role in our thinking and affect whom we allow to make decisions in our organizations. Check yourself, do you have a bias about who should be making the decisions in your organization and does this bias really serve you? Does it prevent people on your team from utilizing their full abilities?

So, if the answer to the above question is “yes” here are four steps you can do today to create a more effective decision-making culture:

- 1) Raise the topic of power and decision-making in a staff meeting. Ask people to talk about how decisions are currently made and encourage them to give voice to how they would like to improve decision-making in your organization? Ask them to tell you whether or not they would be willing to take on more responsibility if you would allow them to make more decisions. You might be surprised by what you hear.
- 2) Inventory the major decisions that have to be made in your organization over the next three months. Write them all out. You will likely be surprised by how many you can put on the list.
- 3) Allow people to advocate for the decisions they would like to make. Let them raise their hand and speak to the decisions they would like to make.
- 4) Give them feedback on their self-advocacy and if you're comfortable, agree to allow them to make the decisions for which they've advocated. Delegating is not advocating. You

can delegate all day long but unless you create the space to enable people to advocate for decisions they want to make, you're just giving them additional responsibilities and they won't feel any sense of ownership.

These are steps that you can take today to create a better decision-making culture. In 2001, the Gallup Business journal reported in an article entitled, "a talent for making Decisions", that, " no single process is more critical to an organizations success than decision-making. Successful companies have learned that they can't afford to let a cumbersome decision-making process be a bottleneck to action." All true and if you don't create a better decision-making culture you'll be wasting the talents of your 30-44 year olds and everyone else.