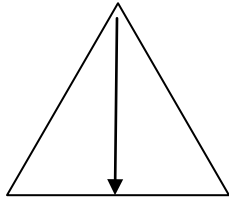


February 2012

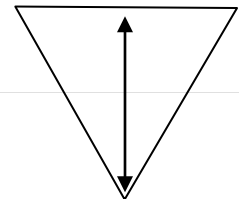
Reversing the Pyramid



A pyramid is often accepted as the standard image of organizational structure. The leader is at the top, his or her direct reports come next in the hierarchy, those who report to the second level are below that, and so on through all levels in the organization. The ideological underpinning of the pyramid is top down. Wherever you are in the pyramid, your role is to serve and support the level above. Sound familiar?

Let's reverse the pyramid and see what happens.

In this model, your role as supervisor or manager becomes ***to serve and support your direct reports!*** In other words, your job is to give them what they need to do their jobs well. What would that mean for your work unit? The shift would be attitudinal, of course, but with practical, behavioral implications.



"True leadership must be for the benefit of the followers" Robert Townsend

First and foremost, instead of giving orders and managing all the details, you'd maintain a consistent focus on what your employees need to get the job done. For example, while the top-down manager would announce a change in their work process by informing them that "from now on it will be done like this," the down-side-up manager realizes that people will be more accepting of a change if they understand the reasoning behind it. Even better, if it's possible for the reversed pyramid manager to consult with staff *before* such a decision is made, input from the front-line people who will be responsible for carrying out the change could lead to a better decision. Ultimately, no one knows better how to improve the effectiveness of their work than the people doing the work.

Imagine yourself in the front-line position relative to your manager. How do you feel when a change is dictated from above? Does it make a difference to you when you receive information about why the decision was made? And how do you feel when you've had the opportunity to participate in a discussion about the potential change? This would not, of course, mean that your views will carry the day. But doesn't the fact that your input was invited help you feel valued and respected – and therefore more motivated and committed? The top-down manager who shares information on a strictly need-to-know basis is asking for trouble. In the absence of communication that flows freely in both directions, rumors and/or gossip generally fill the void.

"The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers." Ralph Nader