

February 2013 Building a “Successful” Workplace Environment

“A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks others have thrown at him.” ~ David Brinkley

The concept of success vs. failure can be a bit fuzzy within public sector environments because—beyond the broad mission of providing services that help citizens—goals and objectives can be unclear and, at times, seem a bit contradictory. However, effective public sector managers will find ways to define success within their areas of responsibility, even in the most challenging of environments.

So how can managers generate a “success” mindset among employees? Here are few things to consider.

- Breaking up complex, unclear goals into manageable and achievable sub-goals will often create a productive sense of success among employees. For example, if a project requires an array of complex actions / accomplishments, acknowledging the achievement of each one as you move through the entire project will generate a sense of confidence and motivation.
- Negativity tends to beget more negativity, leading to a strong sense of failure. Managers can promote a successful work environment by maintaining a positive outlook, even when things look bleak.
- Look on setbacks as learning opportunities. If efforts are not achieving desired outcomes, step back, take a deep breath, and determine the source(s) of the problem. This process will minimize the repeating of errors and poor processes, while creating a learning environment.

“Along with success comes a reputation for wisdom.” ~ Euripides

Most of us have heard the saying that “success is contagious,” meaning that success can build its own momentum. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, well-known author within the business management field recently posted an article in the Harvard Business Review Blog Network noting 10 reasons why winners in sports keep winning.* While winning in sports does not translate perfectly to surviving in government, her comments are certainly applicable. Here are a few reasons why winning generates more winning, according to Professor Kantor, or, in our case, why success generates more success.

- Winning creates a mood of optimism that affects performance and resiliency. Kantor points out that “winning is infectious while loser’s gloom can be toxic.”
- People who feel like winners are more likely to remain connected and actively involved with groups. Kantor cites her research that shows that successful organizations have less absenteeism and tardiness.
- Losers become defensive, less likely to accept feedback on performance. On the other hand, winners are more responsive to critical feedback, believing it will just make them perform better.

As a manager, you have an opportunity to create a winning or success-based workplace environment that will, most likely, generate greater performance and motivation among employees.

“Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it.” ~ Maya Angelou

** Rosabeth Moss Kanter. “Ten Reasons Winners Keep Winning, Aside from Skill.”
HBR Blog Network (August 1, 2012)*