Management and Performance Associates – July-August 2011
Anchor or ballast?

Most people, in any organization, generally start their professional life in one of the classic entry level positions: Intern, Trainee, Assistant or Analyst, among others. These functions require that the incumbents show a given level of technical knowledge and *some* interpersonal competencies.

As time goes by, and the incumbent acquires more technical knowledge and experience, he/she will get promotions to more senior positions, but still as an individual contributor. And then, sometime in the future, this person will get the opportunity to start a managerial career.

At first, the employee perceives this opportunity as recognition for the quality of delivery and for the demonstrated technical competency. Our experience shows that, many times, these were in fact the only criteria used to promote this person to the managerial ranks.

What is the problem with this decision? If technical competence and quality/volume of delivery were the only criteria for making the decision, there is a strong possibility that we will "have lost a great salesperson and found a lousy manager." Why?

As we assume a managerial function, technical competence is important for at least two reasons: first, to legitimize the supervisor for the team; second, because this supervisor, for sure, will be required to provide instruction for the technical execution of the work. Unfortunately, technical competence alone won't be enough to obtain success in the new function. There are other competencies that must be present in order for the new manager to bring the expected added value to the position, as well as performing a key role in the development of the team. Basically, we are talking about interpersonal competencies such as getting team commitment, providing feedback, negotiating with the boss, influencing peers, motivating the team, and so on. Additionally, this new manager is expected to develop a more conceptual understanding of the unit, to think and act

strategically and be able to assess risk involved in decisions. Therefore, success will depend more on developing and consolidating interpersonal skills than technical ones.

It is worthwhile to develop an analysis from the perspective of the employee and another one from the manager's perspective (the person who will make the promotion decision).

The perspective of the employee

As you embark on a managerial career, each turn requires a reflection of three critical questions for success:

1) Which are the competencies that I will need to be successful? Is the baggage that brought me up to this moment of my career the same that I will need from here on?
2) Which beliefs do I have to acquire in order to support the competencies I need to develop? What shall I value? What should I leave behind?
3) How am I going to allocate my time from here on?

The most challenging turn, for any professional, is without a doubt the first one. Exactly when the professional stops being an individual contributor and starts to manage others.

As the new manager reflects on the first question, the tendency is to believe that technical competence by itself, together with others recognizing his/her expertise will be enough to lead a team. The first few days in the new job will bring this person back to reality and he/she will realize that other skills will need to be urgently developed if success is to be achieved in this new position.

The key point is the second question. Probably the dilemma this professional is facing is: "How can I leave behind what brought me here? How am I

going to abandon the ballast of my career – my technical competence?"

This is the most sensitive question. If this person does not adjust his/her beliefs (and start valuing things like the team's capacity, delegating tasks to develop people, open space in the agenda to interact with the team and other key stakeholders) what used to be the ballast will become an anchor, preventing the professional to move ahead, in a successful manner.

Obviously, we are not recommending throwing away the technical competence. The idea is to find balance between its usage and importance so as to not submerge in operational tasks, avoiding delegation, not trusting the team, getting overloaded, doing tasks that do not belong to the supervisor, and more importantly, not doing what he/she should be doing - managing.

The perspective of the manager

1) Before indicating someone for a managerial career, know the person's willingness for the job. Does this person want to be a manager? Contrary to what might seem the obvious, not everyone is cut out to be a manager.
Is this person clear on what this career step requires? Of course the employee will enjoy the salary increase and the new status, but what about the new responsibilities? Is the employee clear that managers work more than the team? That managers work under much more pressure?

2) Assess the employee's potential to develop the interpersonal competencies which are needed for a successful performance.

3) Help the employee during this transition, offering support, feedback and, most of all, coaching.

If we assess and support each promotion, we will be ensuring to the organization that each of its managers are aligned and prepared to fulfill the mission that is expected of them.

This month we have invited Tabatha Dutra, Development and Diversity Manager, Citibank Brazil, to comment on the topic.

"Throughout my career I was able to notice how organizations are more and more moving to a scenario where they prepare leaders, by constantly searching for new tools. Actually, I believe that providing tools to prepare leaders is a key factor to development, together with the awareness that future leaders need to develop to look for this knowledge.

I see we have many tools to help during this transition from manager of self to manager of others. The combination of these tools with the technical knowledge of the function allows the leader to develop primary leadership in a steady manner. This will later evolve, and new skills and competencies will be needed.

One of the roles of the leader is to be responsible for the development of people in the organization. This role requires new competencies and self awareness. This is where organizations are betting and developing new ways to support it by offering new tools. It is up to the new leader to want and look for opportunities to improve and learn."

See you next month. Suggestions are welcome.

To know more of our training programs, please send us an e-mail to:
sergio.pereira@mapa-way.com or
sonia.dondice@mapa-way.com

Visit our website:
www.mapa-way.com