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**The Mathis Group's**

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# Messenger

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## Treating Employees With Dignity Builds Positive Morale

*By Dr. Keith Mathis*

Words break the hearts of good people everyday. It happens in offices and on shop floors. People say things that hurt others and cause hard feelings. This behavior, commonly demonstrated by children on a grade school playground, often remains the lifestyle practiced of adults in the modern world.

### ***Negative comments are the norm in our culture today.***

Many people find something to make negative comments about regardless of the positive experiences happening inside the company. No one can stop us if we decide we want to be negative. Notice what happens the next time workers get together. Do they discuss positive or negative issues?

### ***Negativity will reduce production and decrease profits.***

When employees are negative, our chief concern should not be that our competition might bring us down. Rather, we should be worried that the attitudes of our own people will destroy us from the inside and run our customers off. When negativity is tolerated, a ripple effect from lost productivity will ultimately reduce income and erode profits.

Robert Blake and Jane Mouton points out the relationship between attitudes and performance in their book, Productivity The Human Side:

A key link in accounting for higher or lower productivity is the attitudes toward productivity held by the people who work together. The important questions to be dealt with are: Is it possible for an organization deliberately and explicitly to manage the attitudes of those it employs? Can positive attitudes toward performance be brought about to achieve quality results and advance productivity while reducing waste, maintaining safety, and increasing creativity?" (Blake, R., Mouton, J, Productivity: The Human Side, 1981, AMACOM, p.13-14).

### ***Negativity can be reduced with positive comments.***

It is common for supervisors to set a negative tone by pointing out only those things that are wrong in an employee's performance. When supervisors do this, they help to create an unbalanced, negative view in the employee's mind of his or her performance. Many supervisors have no desire to hurt employee morale or to create negative attitudes; however, that is the result when we focus only on the negative without acknowledging and praising the positive. When we give positive, constructive feedback, we encourage workers to have a healthier, balanced view of themselves. Do you give balanced feedback or is it excessively negative?

As we have seen, supervisors have more than enough reasons to discipline employees with dignity. When the human element is strong and when employees are given respect, morale within a company or organization is enhanced.

With this understanding, will we make the changes necessary to treat employees with dignity, or will we continue to risk the potential of low morale and lawsuits. If we do not take action and train supervisors to stop focusing only on the negative, we will have a high level of turnover and the resulting low morale will cripple our future.

Pat Riley points out the following in his book, The Winner Within:

The team on the court is the team of the moment. When the first string snaps, motivate the players you have, rather than

**(continued on page 2 *Dignity Builds Positive Morale*)**

*People are in greater need of your praise  
when they try and fail, than when they  
try and succeed.*

*Bob Moawad*

# The Mathis Group's Messenger

(continued from page 2 *Dignity Builds Positive Morale*)

moaning about the players, you don't have. You'll never rouse, The Winner Within by making people feel they're only a fill-in for sidelined greatness" (Riley, P., Putnam, 1993, p. 47).

When we convey this confidence to our people, we will begin to see positive change.

## Treating Employees With Dignity Is The Right Thing To Do

Like individuals, every company has values. Unfortunately, some of those values do not carry over into the way we do business.

We have all known supervisors who are cordial to people away from work but who control employees like a tyrant while on the job. These leaders might privately question whether it is possible to practice our stated humane values on the job and still maintain high productivity. A better question to ask today would be, "How can the modern organization keep its employee base if leaders refuse to incorporate strong values into the workplace?"

When managers value workers and show them respect by giving each person the same humane treatment, the result will always be a healthier work environment. Even if employees are disrespectful, management must continue to set the example. In the modern world of business, management is held to a higher standard than ever before. This higher standard requires that leaders must conduct themselves in a proper manner regardless of the employee's behavior. Bad treatment of the leader by the employee does not justify bad treatment of the employee by the leader.

Setting the example means walking your talk. Leaders must speak and act in a consistent way. You have probably known of supervisors who believed their position allowed them to defy the rules. Such behavior creates anger and distrust, and it increases the feeling that management is hypocritical. At times, supervisors may temporarily step outside the rules to deal with unique cases. They typically have the authority to take this kind of action when the situation requires it. However, it is critical that management always uses discernment when deviating from an established policy. Managers must always focus on walking their talk and being people whose words and actions are consistent.

When Henley wrote the prophetic lines, "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul," he should have informed us that we are the masters of our fate, the captains of our souls, because we have the power to control our thoughts.

He should have told us that our brains become magnetized with the dominating thoughts which we hold in our minds, and, by means with which no man is familiar, these "magnets" attract to us the forces, the people, the circumstances of life which harmonize with the nature of our dominating thoughts" (Hill, N., 1960, Fawcett, p. 29).





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**The Mathis Group, Inc.**  
Dr. Keith Mathis  
106 Lakeview Woods  
Eureka, MO 63025  
1-800-224-3731  
636/938-5292 voice/fax  
GSA Contractor- GS10F0383M  
kmathis@ix.netcom.com  
www.keithmathis.com