

ENCOURAGING EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION: THE FINAL, FRIGHTENING FRONTIER FOR EASTERN EUROPE'S MANAGERS

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***Abstract:** The evidence is incontrovertible – empowered workers are more productive, reduce costs to lower limits, make more profit for their employers, and are more likely to stay with the company when other offers come. It is also beyond doubt that the empowered workforce cannot develop without the encouragement and active support of management. But management practice in this part of the world is rooted in traditions of authority, of social distance between bosses and workers, and in which workers are not encouraged to make suggestions about improving work practices. Until managers permit and encourage participation thoughtful contributions by workers, economic results will always be marginal and prohibit regional industries from competing effectively in global markets.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Toward the end of my presentation to this Conference last year, I commented that “...managers are invested in authority, in personal power, and in the social distance that must be maintained between managers and the peons. These attitudes are destructive to organizational effectiveness, but they are so pervasive, people hardly notice them. They just respond – by withholding their gifts of extra effort and care, and their insights into how to get work done better, faster, and cheaper.”¹ Of course, that will impact the ability of organizations in Romania and elsewhere across the post-Soviet bloc to compete effectively.

This point has been made countless numbers of times by writers, lecturers, consultants, but none to my knowledge have ever attributed this phenomenon to the fact that managers are fearful of changing their behavior, of managing in a style different than the one that has produced success. Managers are the critical variable in so many production and profit equations, but it appears that no one has looked past the obvious point that participative management is a positive and profit-producing strategy to wonder why managers do not immediately respond, “Wow! Yes! Let’s do that!”

There must be a reason. I suggest that managers, like all other corporate employees, live in fear of losing their jobs, of seeing their companies crash, along with individual retirement plans and benefits. That means that now – like at all points in the past – is a bad time to try-on new behaviors, new ways of ensuring that work gets done on time and budget, and that the numbers look good! Airy-fairy, touchy-feely, rapport-building is no substitute for control through close supervision and putting the fear of God into those who are not performing. “Kick ass and take names” is alive and well at managers’ meetings and in luncheon conversations.

One of my most valuable discoveries has been the idea that “There are only two great lessons in life – love and fear – and guess which one predominates?” That came from Gerald

Jampolsky², a California psychiatrist who worked with dying children, who observed the courage of children in the face of death – until some trusted adult filled them with fear.

How do institutions govern, from kindergartens to international corporations? Fear is always present, like the thumping bass in the background of most recorded music. Management gurus encourage us to think “outside the box,” but few of us who receive salaries believe that would be pay-off behavior. We know the norms, the written and unwritten rules of our employers, and we have seen what happens to those who violate the rules. Conversely, we meet every day the faces of the go-along-and-get-along gang of survivors, and their compliance becomes the model for our own behavior. Even, and maybe most particularly, in universities.

Perhaps it is apocryphal, but rumor has it that the American who invented the Japanese management system, W. Edwards Deming³, would not conduct a corporate seminar unless the company’s president attended. He knew that changes in strategies, styles, and the adoption of new ideas had to be initiated and reinforced from the top, and that his time would be wasted if the top man chose not to participate. How many times in the West, and in the clumsy attempts to clone Western values in the institutions of Eastern Europe, has Deming’s rule been violated? Rectors and pro-Rectors and Managing Directors have succeeded. They have no need of further training, nor do they need to consider their down-line messages about pay-off behavior. And so ,, nothing changes!

2. THE SEDUCTIVE SIMPLICITY OF AUTHORITY

My Irish Catholic mother was schooled by nuns, and she learned their punishing ways. She beat me with sticks until my legs bled, and once when I was about seven, my father slapped me so hard his hand-print glowed on my face for the entire day (my mother did not allow me to go to Sunday School that morning). Later, I chose the Marine Corps for my obligatory military service and learned more about harsh discipline and punishment (though I was more often an observer than a recipient).

Respect the rules. Know them and play by them. Stay within the box. Take no risks -- the possibility of a reward is too small, and the certainty of punishment is too large. By these and other means, the lessons of fear are imposed on us. No wonder one of Deming’s 14 prescriptions⁴ for organizational success was to eliminate fear.

Easier said than done. Fear is in the air, in the culture, and it is the common denominator of human experience. You think high-level executives are immune? Think again! Almost 20 years ago Peter Drucker⁵, America’s #1 management guru, said that every executive in America had his current CV in his desk drawer, so mistrustful were they all of the slash-and-burn mentality of corporate raiders and their consolidating, downsizing, rightsizing, and asset-plundering. Drucker might have said, “Well, so much for corporate trust and loyalty!”

Now, in the midst of a pervasive economic crisis, how free do you imagine the typical middle manager is to play around with soft concepts like participative management? And what messages do these managers pass along to the foremen and supervisors below them? And how deeply do they bow to the senior managers above them?

In truth, manager education is largely a matter of “monkey see-monkey do” mimicking of the behavior of those senior persons, down to the clothes and shoes they wear. In the olden days at IBM, everyone wore dark suits, starched white shirts, and conservative ties. Once, an IBMer wore a yellow shirt to a meeting, and it was reported in the *New York Times!* And some years later, I attended a meeting at the headquarters of CLOROX, wearing an expensive blazer, dark slacks, shirt and tie and I was under-dressed. Everyone else was wearing dark suits and black wing-tip shoes.

This is almost comical in the context of today's casual dress codes, but in every organization, there are some rules that apply. However whimsical they may seem, they are accepted as serious commitments by the organization's upwardly-mobile managers and professional employees. They understand, even if outsiders do not, the signal significance of shirts, ties, and suits – the uniform of that private army.

In preparing to write this paper, it occurred to me that I might never have come upon this idea – that most managers are afraid to risk exchanging authoritarian management for participative management – were I still in the cultural comfort of California. Living for a decade in Eastern Europe has been enormously instructive about my own cultural blindness and insensitivity. What follows is a brief recounting of some of the high points of my personal transformation from an almost-reactionary conservative to a progressive, almost-libertarian senior citizen. (As a friend noted, that is unusual in that people tend to become more conservative, rather than less, as they age.)

I was an officer in the U.S. Marines, comfortable in the “my country, right or wrong” mindset. I thought the Beatles were probably subversive hippies who needed haircuts and a bath. I heard their music – it was unavoidable – but not their lyrics. But now, listening to the lyrics, I am aware of the incredible messages they offered, and how closed minds -- like my own – couldn't accept the messages. So how is it that I am here, leaning to the left instead of rigidly right, and speaking in defense of fearful managers?

My best guess is that the transformation of my outlook, attitude, and philosophy went through five phases: First, the loss to cancer of a much-loved wife. Second, the gentle lessons of a homosexual priest. Third, the startling comment of a horse trainer. Fourth, the move to Eastern Europe and the discovery that, compared to most of the people I met here, I was really quite a liberal thinker. And Fifth, the discovery that so many of the values I held were of questionable value in this part of the world. Here, so often, convenience is of greater value than ethics; and corruption, major and minor, benefits the affluent while it cripples entire societies and puts the most vulnerable among us (including abused women and dependent children) at risk of losing entire lifetimes of productive, constructive contributions.

How do these five episodes connect? Actually, it's a linear path of connections, an emotional flowchart of discovery, of dissonance discarded, and of re-discovering the power of confrontation (you have to admit a problem before you can solve it!) as a personal and emotional style. That is, in matters of conscience, go for the jugular, cut to the chase, to the bottom line, and remember that our brains will ask more questions than they can answer in our sub-conscious effort to avoid confrontations with truth. Here, in summary form, is how these episodes connected.

Long-term illness and death are tough teachers, and bring unwanted but necessary lessons. In America, where “conservative” politics collude with medical associations and pharmaceutical companies so openly, the economic calamity I faced was nearly as devastating as the other losses – the wife, her fearful, pain-avoiding children, the home we had sacrificed to acquire, and all the equity in it. In a word, I lost everything and found myself camped out with friends, thinking, “Something is wrong with this picture!” A God-believing, church-serving, hard-working, dutiful husband and step-father should not end up in these circumstances. Or so I thought.

Of course, that wasn't the end. Along the way, a gay priest was a rock on whom I came to depend. I tried to think his being gay didn't matter, but of course it did – until one night at dinner in his home. His partner of 20 years was there, along with about 20 other guests, all guys, and all having been together in pairs for one or two decades, and most were professionals (bankers, lawyers, doctors, etc.). Again, something was wrong with the picture – or maybe what

was wrong was the picture in my head! As I met and chatted with other guests, and seeing my wife celebrated as the only biological female there, and of course winning the door prize (a thoughtful and generous gift), I realized it was time to do some re-thinking, some re-valuing. It wasn't easy, because I had to give up a lot of old messages firmly rooted in my head, planted by parents and priests and a homophobic society. But as I began to win the battle with my bias, I also became aware of the unhappiness of some of those around me about my evolving acceptance of the unacceptable. I heard them say things I used to say, and found them sounding ignorant and stuck in the culture of our childhoods during which we were taught that there is one way to Heaven, where neither deviations nor deviants were tolerated.

And so it was sad to find myself drifting away from people of the heart, family and friends for years, but among whom I had become a misfit. But being among them made me more unhappy than losing them, so I sort of drifted away.

About that time, the horse trainer⁶ entered my life. I was at a conference, and all of us were taken to a farm to meet the horse trainer who had become a TV celebrity, having been invited by the Queen of England to train her horse handlers. I stood at the rail of the circular corral, watching as a horse only recently broken to a bridle and never ridden, trotted nervously around the circle, attached to the trainer by a long, loosely held lead. The trainer wore a microphone, and told us in a quiet voice what was happening, what the horse was thinking, and what the horse would do. It was uncanny. It was beautiful. And only moments after the trainer predicted it, the horse came hesitantly to the trainer's back and rested its muzzle on the trainer's shoulder. That was the signal that the horse was ready to "join up" with the trainer. As they say, I lost it. I wept openly and without shame, tears coursing down my cheeks as they hadn't since the early days of my wife's disease. Later, chatting with the trainer, I mentioned the tears. He said, before turning away to speak with someone else, "You must have had a brutal father."

How had he come to such a conclusion? How had my tears, in response to a demonstration of cross-species gentleness, led to the prompt and unconditional conclusion that I had been the victim of a brutal father? It was a question that I worked on for months, for years really, before the answer presented itself clearly and unambiguously: I wept for what I had never known and for what was my deepest hunger.

I wanted, like that horse, to join up with someone. Maybe my dead wife and I would have made it, but I had failed twice before and once since, and with lots of intermediate episodes. I had to recognize that the fault was not only in the persons chosen, but in the process of choosing. That is, I was bringing old, proven-to-fail rules to new games. About the time I came to this recognition, I remembered a book I had read some years before. I will name the author for a second time in this paper, because I want you to find and read this book: Gerold Jampolsky, MD, *Teach Only Love*.⁷ He was a psychiatrist who worked with dying children, and he wrote of their incredible courage and what he learned -- that there are only two messages in life: love and fear. In everything we say, everything we think, we are projecting love or fear. All the messages tucked away in our heads, from parents, priests, teachers, spouses, friends fall into two categories -- love or fear.

When we learn to be fearful, which can be predicted by the preponderance of fear messages in most of our heads, we learn the lesson of rules and obedience. The more certain we are that punishment follows even minor disobedience, the more rigid we become in our thinking, in our perceived choices, and in our sense of right and wrong, good and bad, the worthiest and the worthless. Somehow, among the righteous, those who are on the economic bottom are there because they are bad people or people whose parents made bad choices. Helping them is wasting money. Even the Bible promises that "The poor ye shall always have with you," and conservative politicians tend to shape legislation that ensures that promise will be fulfilled.

This brings me to the Eastern European connection in the flow of my evolution. I might say more accurately, to the post-Soviet world in which I and many other Westerners found people bound up in fears we outsiders found irrational. We found locals unnecessarily rigid, inflexible in their routines, and terrified of making mistakes or being criticized. These people manifested the clinical descriptions of adults who had been abused as children, who were reared in a fear-based environment. As I interacted with them, I was caused to wonder about the similarities in our behaviors, theirs and mine, and maybe in the causes of that behavior.

Instead of the Soviet mindset, enforced by the constant threat of the KGB and the reality that someone in most families had been victimized for minor misdeeds, I found that I had been reared in a household governed by the unpredictable rages of an alcoholic who felt himself socially superior to his wife. He resented his son, who was the result of the pregnancy that trapped him.

- Harsh physical punishment? Sometimes.
- Cutting, demeaning, dismissive comments? Frequently.
- Continuing reminders of being less-than-expected? Always.

After visiting my family for the first time, my second wife commented, “My God! How did you escape?” But of course, I didn’t escape – not really. There I was at 35, 50, 60 still dragging around the success-inhibiting sense of not being okay, of not being enough, and all the while trying desperately to over-compensate, to get rid of the burden of fear and guilt for things I didn’t do. Wow! No wonder I felt at home immediately, here in Eastern Europe. I was among kindred spirits!

That brings me to the fifth link in my transformation, the confrontation with corruption, that pervasive disease that eats away economic opportunity for the entire country and visits most intimately the most vulnerable among us. As with all of us who live here, we are aware of some kind of shuck-and-jive is going on at the edge of our lives – working off-the-meter, avoiding taxes, petty dishonesties, avoiding parental responsibilities (as do so many former husbands who are not made to pay child support), and paying officials for courtesies -- like the mother who was going to pay the equivalent of 3,000 Euros to get her daughter an entry-level government job. In August, 2009.

Three times, corrupt people in Lithuania have caused me to lose jobs and money. I won’t mention them all, but the one that rankles most is having to leave a university because I refused to change grades for lying students. Those lies were confirmed to the administration by other students, and my position was confirmed by the investigation of a third-country ambassador. My conversion experience was nearly complete when, after 75 minutes of repeated reasons why I had to admit my error and affirm the integrity of the lying students, I told the university rector, “Enough. I’m losing respect for you. I will resign.”

But to add insult to injury, when I was recommended to another university by the son of its rector, I was told by the number-two guy in the business school, “I don’t think our graduate students are smart enough to understand what you want to teach.” I knew I was dead as an aspiring instructor, but was it because their graduate students were so intellectually limited? Or because I had proved myself unreliable by having relied on values that cannot be counted on to work here?

Wasting me and my potential contributions was of no real consequence to those Lithuanians involved, and it was not the first time, here and in the U.S., when telling the truth and keeping my job were values in opposition. A former wife once said, “The next time you feel compelled to be so G-----d honest, why don’t you remember we have a mortgage to pay!”

An American psychologist⁸ came up with an interesting observation – that behavior change comes when people are caused to have a “significant emotional experience.” The reason I have shared my five significant emotional experiences is to remind you of how difficult it is to change hard heads and hard hearts; how tough it is to move other-directed people to make socially-sensitive choices. How tough it is to move insecure and really frightened managers to work *with* employees instead of imposing on them.

Remember, we conservatives take our marching orders from God, who is the original strict and punishing father, and who is the author of all that is Good, and who is opposed by the dark energies whose defeat deposits them at the bottom of the heap. Being at the low end of the socio-economic continuum, held down by the weight of all that Goodness above them, is proof that the economic and social bottom have violated God’s laws. Conservatives believe this is so, and you will have to shame them into changing their positions. Shame and blame and criticism are what they fear most. Living out the Ladies Bountiful myth – sharing your resources with those less fortunate – is not going to convince or convert a single conservative. So the question comes down to this: Do you have the stomach to fight back, to bring light into the dark corners of rooms no one wants to see?

That’s where your leverage is. Have you got the courage to use it?

But rather than getting into a shame-based contest, why not use common sense? If you have the good fortune to work with an organization in transition to participative management, remind the managing director that he or she must be visible and persistent in legitimizing the new behaviors to be required of managers. Get the MD set up managers’ meetings to discuss their successes and frustrations with involving workers in planning and controlling work. Be lavish in praise of those whose employees are becoming involved, and generous in support of managers who are having trouble with the program. And continue to do this as long as necessary. Really, there is an almost-immediate pay-off.

The man who may have been America’s ultimate motivational guru, Frederick Herzberg⁹, proved repeatedly and internationally two powerful facts about people at work. The first is that the number-one thing that satisfies people at work is the work itself. That is, if they feel good about the work they are doing and the way they are treated by their managers, they will feel good about themselves and their jobs and their bosses and their companies.

The second thing Herzberg’s real-world research promises is almost magical. I had the privilege of being on a program with him, many years ago in Oakland, California and he was talking about how people are used and how they are treated by their managers. Here is what he promised: “If you treat people with respect – that is, if you don’t piss them off – they will give you ten or fifteen percent more output for nothing!”

Imagine! Ten or fifteen percent extra output for no additional cost! That is a message that should capture the attention of managing directors everywhere – and now it is your message to deliver. Surely, such a result would justify the careful reorienting of managers so they will, in turn, encourage participation and involvement by employees in planning and executing the work they do. What Herzberg’s methodology boils down to is treating employees as fellow adults, as people who want to succeed at work and to be part of successful work groups. Allow them to take pride in what they do and to feel good about themselves, and wonderful things can happen.

Before I experienced the series of transitions mentioned above, I was hired by a major American corporation to assist in breaking a union-organizing effort. I asked why I had been chosen, and the client’s representative spoke bluntly. “You have the reputation of being the meanest sonofabitch in the consulting business!” I had not known that, and I guess I was proud of it. Probably, the hard edge I was able to bring to my work contributed to success on that

assignment. The union did not form. The employees did not vote for the union -- because the managers changed their behavior, their ways of dealing with employees and each other.

Few groups of managers ever have revised their management styles so quickly, but those eleven men knew that they would be fired if the union-organizing campaign among their employees succeeded. They were highly motivated to do whatever they must to gain the trust of their employees. So, what did I teach them in four days? Not that much, actually. I just pointed out some choices: To be friendly instead of distant; to treat employees as colleagues instead of enemies; to involve them in making work decisions instead of treating them as though they were ignorant and without ideas for better, faster, cheaper ways to do their work; and most of all, to listen when employees wanted to offer information or ideas. Listening is maybe the most difficult skill to master.

In my book on communications¹⁰, I quoted a university administrator who said that listening was her most difficult management task. “You have to love your people enough to really listen to them,” she said. Perhaps male managers also could have identified listening as their most difficult task, but how many men would have spoken of “loving” their employees? Not too many, in my experience. But if you don’t love the people who work for you, how do you teach love? And if you cannot teach love, does it follow that you are teaching fear?

People who teach fear are not necessarily bad people. Maybe they are just doing what they know, what they have seen, what they have been rewarded for doing. And until something or someone intervenes, breaks into their habituated behavior to create a significant emotional experience, how are they supposed to see a different, more effective way of managing?

3. CONCLUSIONS

In closing, let me say that I hope I would no longer be identified as a harsh and hard-headed person. I think I have evolved into a different kind of consultant and helper, using my native and learned competencies more effectively because life has ground-down some of the rough edges I used to have. I laugh more than I used to, and I have more patience and more fun. I hope this sharing of some of my transitions will encourage you to help the managers you may encounter to overcome their fears of vulnerability in building new relationships with their employees. It will be useful work for you to do, and important. I wish you every possible success!

Dr. Woody Sears has been training managers and leaders since 1967. Tested in more than 200 organizations and presented in more than 100 public seminars, his techniques for resolving organizational conflicts have helped thousands of managers just like you to solve problems, develop employees, and enhance their personal effectiveness. Early in his career, Woody was lucky to have been accepted as a resource person by Leadership Resources, Inc., one of the early behaviorally-oriented consulting firms. That provided opportunities to work with and learn from many of the scholars and consultants who were developing the framework for what subsequently became Human Resource Development. Chief among those mentors was Leonard Nadler, Woody’s major professor in the doctoral program at The George Washington University. Professor Nadler coined the term HRD and is the creator of that academic and professional discipline. Those experiences followed a Master’s program in change management at North Carolina State, and a tour as a U.S. Marine officer. Beyond consulting and presenting public seminars (mostly on project management), Woody has designed customized project management systems for a number of companies and government agencies. Throughout his career, he has worked to simplify essential management information so it’s accessible to everyone. During 2007 and 2008, 6 of his books for managers were published by HRD Press in Massachusetts, USA. Contact Information: Email: woodysears@gmail.com.

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2. Gerald Jampolsky, MD and his partner Diane Cirincione, PhD created the International Center for Attitudinal Healing in Tiburon, CA (USA) in 1975. Through the Center and affiliated centers around the world, free or affordable emotional help is provided to children and adults facing catastrophic illnesses. Many pages of information on Google.
3. W. Edwards Deming was a statistician and management expert who was sent to Japan by the U.S. Agency for International Development after World War Two. His approach to statistical controls and management were accepted by the Japanese and widely applied, leading Dr. Deming to become "the father of Japanese management" and the man after whom the Deming Prize for managerial excellence was named. In particular, he is associated with the quality movement and the success of Toyota.
4. Deming's 14 Principles are presented in full on Google. See [www. Quality register.co.uk/14 principles.html](http://www.Qualityregister.co.uk/14principles.html).
5. Peter Drucker wrote 39 books, hundreds of articles, and for 20 years a column for the *Wall Street Journal* newspaper. He is said to have been the man who invented the corporation, and the list of his quotes could be the syllabus for an extensive management seminar. Extensive coverage on Google.
6. Monty Roberts has published three books, starred in a TV documentary, trained horse handlers for the British Queen, and is known wherever people care about horses as the man who revolutionized horse training by replacing harsh treatment with gentle methods based on horse psychology.
7. Gerald G. Jampolsky. *Teach Only Love*. New York: Simon and Schuster.Re-Issue 2001.
8. Morris Massey, PhD, is a sociologist and produced of management training videos. As an academic, he focused on values development and his films provide insight into using his model to interpret and shape behavior of others, both as a parent and as a manager.
9. Frederick Herzberg was an influential psychologist whose Two-Factor Hygiene and Motivation Theory was widely studied and frequently applied. One of his articles, "One more time, How do you motivate employees?" sold more than 1.2 million copies when published by the Harvard Business School. Extensive coverage on Google.
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