

# Effective management

## Eye on the entrepreneur

A few years ago, a major company noticed a very disturbing trend: Highly talented and effective female executives were leaving the company.

Management tried to work out a suitable solution to the situation by offering higher salaries and more enticing benefits, but still valuable female employees were leaving the company.

What senior management considered solutions just were not working. The exodus continued. Finally, after much discussion and intensive exit interviews. Senior management discovered the reason: Female executives were not being asked to take business trips for the company.

On the other hand, male executives were traveling extensively on company business. As it turned out, female executives were not being asked because their mostly male bosses assumed that female executives, especially the mothers of small children, would not want to travel for the company because they did not want to leave their families or would be uncomfortable traveling as a woman alone.

Senior management saw the exodus of female executives as the *problem* and tried to solve the problem with higher salaries and better benefits. Female executives, on the other hand, saw the lack of business travel as a hindrance to promotion.

To further explore this issue, we spoke with Vince Zirpoli, president of Mega Marketing in Timonium, who suggested that senior management saw a disturbing trend and tried to treat it as a problem instead of realizing that it was a *symptom* of the problem.

Zirpoli says that the senior management of many companies falls into the trap of treating symptoms as problems. As an example, Zirpoli mentions the following: A leveling off of productivity, shrinking margins, continuous turnover,

low morale and poor customer service.

There are many other symptoms that are treated as problems, and maybe you, dear reader, are now recognizing what you thought to be a problem is, in reality, a symptom.

Take, for instance, the symptom of low employee moral. Thinking of it as a problem, it may be treated with motivational speakers or team-building activities when the real problem may be that the employees don't understand or buy into the strategic plan of the company.

According to Zirpoli, the best way to identify the problems underlying the symptoms is to have a *strategic management system*. A strategic management system is composed of the subsystems of strategic planning and performance management.

We all have strategic management systems for every part of our lives, no matter how mundane. All companies have strategic management systems as well; however most of the key elements of the system are subliminal rather than conscious.

Zirpoli gives the analogy of driving a car from Baltimore to Annapolis. The strategic management system deals with the questions of "where do we want to go?" and "how do we get there?"

For most of us, driving has become an unconscious activity. Most of us apply the gas pedal, brake when necessary and watch the speed, while at the same time rehearsing a presentation, mulling over a problem, listening to the radio or talking on a cell phone.

Just as driving is an unconscious or subliminal activity, (compared to what it was like when you first learned to drive!), so are key parts of many corporate strategic plans.

While some parts of the plan are communicated to the employees, in many cases the key elements of the strategic management system reside in the minds of senior management. These key items are never shared with employees, and as a result, management

does not get the desired results.

To have a successful strategic management plan, says Zirpoli, senior management needs to dredge those subliminal but vital issues to the surface and share them with their employees.

Example: "This is our company, and this is what we do. These are our goals, and this is how we intend to achieve them." Makes a lot of sense, doesn't it? Just think how much better the driver who cut you off while yakking on his cell phone would be if he dredged up some of *his* subliminal parts of driving a car. Just think how much better a company would be if all those subliminal issues were brought to the surface and effectively shared with the employees.

OK, now I know what I need to do. How do I get started?

Well, Zirpoli has developed a questionnaire that will help the entrepreneur develop a *conscious* strategic management system. A series of negative responses in a specific area may indicate weaknesses that are causing problems.

On the other hand, an overwhelming number of positive responses may indicate that there is a problem in implementing the plan.

If you would like to have a copy of the questionnaire, Vince can be reached at [vzirpoli@aol.com](mailto:vzirpoli@aol.com) or by calling him at 410-252-4219.

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