

# MAKING THE HARD DECISIONS

## *THE MANAGER'S ROLE*

Far too often, managers seem to avoid making the hard decisions, hoping that problems will just disappear. Managers need to recognize that their role is precisely that – analyze the situation, make a decision and execute it. Avoidance just digs a bigger and uglier hole.

In meeting a new customer that wanted *Leadership Training* for their supervisors, I was informed that a union had just been certified. I observed that unions don't just fall from the sky and that most often they are not the outcome of a single event, but rather are a response to the working environment over a long period. I asked the Human Resources Manager to describe the culture of the organization. Very quickly, it became apparent that the root cause of a very offensive situation was the Plant Manager.

The Plant Manager had a very strong personality, and he tended to bully both employees and his corporate superiors. His total fixation was on production and there was no awareness of the social needs of the workforce. He played favourites when it suited him, thus creating a sour workplace. I stated that the training wouldn't stick and that the situation would continue to deteriorate, as long as he remained in that position. The Human Resources Manager ventured that even the President knew the problem, but no one was taking any action.

During negotiations over the Collective Agreement, the union struck, much to the company's utter surprise. Money was not the issue. The union stated flatly that they didn't trust the Plant Manager and that they were prepared to suspend negotiations, as long as he was at the table. Finally the President intervened and sent away the Plant Manager. The union voted for the Collective Agreement that night.

So what can we learn from this episode?

The Plant Manager was behaving inappropriately and had done so for a long time. Although the President was aware of the situation, he accepted it, because the Plant Manager was delivering the production numbers. If the President did what he knew he had to do (dismiss the Plant Manager), production might be disrupted. What the President didn't calculate into his decision to delay action, however, was the true cost of the Plant Manager's behaviour.

The Plant Manager's behaviour resulted in the certification of the union, a strike which disrupted production, legal bills approaching a ¼ of a million dollars, and a workforce that will need attention, in order for the company to re-build its relationship. In the end, the President had to fire the Plant Manager, anyway. A decisive Manager, having identified and analyzed the situation, would have made a decision and executed it immediately.

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