



DallaCor

Leadership Development and Coaching

Marie Knapp EdD is president of DallaCor. DallaCor serves individuals and teams who wish to nurture and inspire the people in their workplaces to become the best they can be. DallaCor uses principles based on the work of Lance Secretan and other contemporary leadership models. DallaCor's dedicated and qualified consultants work with clients to meet their unique needs as they implement strategic directions and integrate spirit and values into their organizations. For more information about the author and DallaCor, visit www.dallacor.com . Email mknapp@dallacor.com

Inspire your middle management: help them work with you to stoke the fire by first meeting their needs

An inspiring vision is like a fire. As senior executives in an organization, you readily take on the challenge of lighting this fire, but a greater challenge may await you in keeping the fire going and making sure that it reaches all individuals. There is no guarantee that the warmth and glow you have lit through your commitment to the strategic vision will be extended to those who work directly with your organization's service or product. It is your enthusiasm and the environment you create for your managers that determine how well the glow spreads throughout.

Middle managers are the key link in keeping the fire burning. They stoke the fire, add fuel when required, and fan the flames for steady burning. Middle managers keep the fire contained and focused so that is never destructive. Essentially, middle managers ensure the flow of information and are the vehicle for communication of direction, values, and feedback within the organization. When this works well, the organization has a consistent flow – the fire burns well, providing warmth and glow as intended. The middle managers guide the expertise you employ so your people and the organization will shine.

There are several determining factors that will contribute significantly to the success of your strategic vision and your relationship with middle managers. The values of openness and understanding, trust and truthfulness, honoring and caring, are the kindling needed for a successful fire, and will help middle managers and your organization achieve your desired direction. The factors listed below describe the environment that you can create for success.

Informed managers spread the right information in the right places. We live in a communication age yet the biggest problem cited over and over again in businesses and organizations is that people are not well informed. Perhaps it is information overload, but, none-the-less, you can help by letting your managers know you are open with information.

Help the managers to fully understand your cause – the reason for the strategic direction of the organization. It is unfair to ask managers to have their reports follow a path that the managers themselves do not believe in or understand. Managers struggle not because they are at odds with

the organization but simply because they do not have enough information to really get caught up in the passion of its cause.

Like you, managers can, and must be passionate about the organizational vision too. Share your passion for your vision, or cause and your commitment will be catchy. When your managers understand it at a deep level, they will share it with the rest of the organization with that same enthusiasm and the direction will be achieved

Stress your commitment to quality. When you communicate the bottom-line as only financial and not quality, your managers may be confused by the values and make poor decisions. Ensure that your managers know that you support quality standards and when decisions are made, it is quality products and quality service that bring the financial achievements.

Organizations thrive when managers work in a climate of trust. Their energy can be directed toward the work they do, in fact, the work they love to do, if they are not concerned about basic survival and esteem needs.

Managers need to know that their position is secure. If people work in fear of losing their jobs, they do not work well. If people work in fear of being criticized or humiliated they are not productive. Managers need to know that the effort that they put into their work is well received and recognized.

Creating organizational trust requires values that are not only written and posted on walls, but also lived through every decision-making process and every interaction. Trust exists where truth is exchanged without negative repercussions and in a context of love, understanding, mutual respect, compassion, dignity and confidentiality.

Be authentic. When you are authentic, what you speak, write, think and feel will be congruent. What you communicate will not be misconstrued. Your managers will not receive mixed messages. When you know who you are, and your words are congruent with your actions, you communicate trust.

When your managers are authentic and truthful with you, you gather the information you need to make the right decisions. In a trusting environment, your managers will be comfortable communicating authentically and truthfully with you.

Ask what the managers need to support the strategic direction of the business or organization. Because the managers are operating in a culture of trust, your support will be well received. Providing the requested support, demonstrates your commitment and the manager will thrive.

Listen to the feedback that comes to you through the managers. Managers are the eyes and ears of your organization, and their feedback will let you know what is happening out there. If you discourage this feedback, or lead the manager to believe that only good news is appropriate then you lose a key method of tuning in to what is most required in your organization.

Know what managers value and honor them. In a trusting environment, your managers will feel comfortable sharing moments when their values feel conflicted. Being able to express and solve the dilemma reduces the energy it would otherwise have absorbed and detracted from the work at hand.

When managers are recognized and valued for their uniqueness, they shine. When the managers shine, the organization shines.

Notice the managers' strengths and use them. Your organization will benefit from having people who do their work well do it even better and share their expertise with other people in the organization. Know their goals and help them meet those aims.

Demonstrate your respect and value for their uniqueness by not using a cookie cutter approach for all. The support that one needs is not the support needed by others. Respond to their uniqueness and consider it a gift. There is opportunity in the diverse strengths and uniqueness of each manager.

Demonstrate your caring for people and not just things by asking your managers about what is important to them. When you want to recognize an individual's efforts, do so in a way that demonstrates your honoring of what is important to each one.

If the strengths of the manager and the requirements of the position are not aligned, realign the job or the person. Helping people connect with the work that best suits their skills will demonstrate to all that employees are valued and treated with respect.

You have lit the fire. Now create the environment that ensures its success. The factors discussed above will help you do so. Remember though, that to be truly successful, the senior team must be sufficiently comfortable with themselves to be open, trusting, and supportive of the managers. Where senior teams thrive only because of inauthentic games they choose to play, the work with the middle managers is far less effective. The work begins inside each of you and your senior team. The beginning stage of helping middle managers work with you is establishing openness, trust and support within the senior team. When that trust exists, the rest is easy.

Watch for more articles by the author as she discusses some these points in more detail with examples and suggested actions.