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Using tough love to get results

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News
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The skills shortage in industry is focusing attention on how to grow your own high-flyers, by monitoring and managing their performance as an integral part of the management agenda.

It is commonly accepted that performance management cannot be conducted as an impersonal process. It should be a motivational methodology, powered by interpersonal relationships that respect not only ability and potential, but also experience and authority.

This revives the long-running debate over the roots of motivation in the workplace. And recent findings are tending to show up the limitations of the new, enlightened, 'caring-&-sharing' management style that is assumed to score measurably over yesterday's autocratic approach.

It seems that dynamic, ambitious workers don't necessarily respect people who just want to be liked, at the expense of delivering results.

The analogy with football teams is obvious - no-one wants a losing manager. This is confirmed by a major recent study by Europe's largest provider of leadership and management skills that showed that people would rather work for a hard taskmaster who always meets targets than an easy-going one, who often misses them.

Significantly, there used to be many official and rather long-winded descriptions of leadership. Today, there is a strong consensus in favour of a more modern version, i.e. 'making people do what they don't necessarily want, in order to achieve a desired result'.

There will be times, of course, when leadership has to be prepared to say the unpopular thing, break the unwelcome news and level the hurtful criticism - when appropriate.

In other words, the Tough Love factor should be incorporated into the management policy you decide to operate.

We can take two examples of how the modern approach may represent bad management.

First, the tendency to help out by performing tasks yourself that you were meant to delegate. Too much emphasis on the 'team as a partnership' may obscure the need for an employee to

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face the responsibility of carrying out his specifically appointed duties.

It's similar to bringing up small children - continuing to carry them when you should be insisting that they learn to walk on their own two feet.

Second, this attitude indicates too much pre-occupation with how people feel about you. And this 'can take your eye off the ball'.

More specifically, it is also inefficient time-management. Worrying about other people's feelings or your popularity, in general, can waste unlimited amounts of time, while also distracting you from the proper implementation of your agenda.



Being overly supportive, therefore, may make you feel that you're an enlightened modern manager, but in reality, it reflects an abdication from essential leadership imperatives, and will fail the essential test of motivating and retaining the very people who represent the future of your organisation.

Key points: About the Tough Love principle

- The skills shortage is a major test of employee development
- Modern leadership methods may not challenge sufficiently
- Leadership has a lot to do with making unpopular decisions

The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivated speaker, with 20 years' experience as CEO of Carole Spiers' Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.

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