

CUTTINGS...

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Compiled and edited by Geof Cox

The FINAL edition of CUTTINGS...

Since starting to enjoy retirement at the end of last year, I realise that I don't need to continue to spend so much time keeping up to date with trends in organisation and personal development, so I have started to cancel the subscriptions to journals and e-zines that kept me informed of trends and research. So my inbox is now more manageable but the key source of my source of material for Cuttings has gone. As I predicted in the last issue, I will not renew my mailing subscription that ends with this edition. So, Cuttings #165 will be the last.

Thank you all for your encouraging comments throughout the 30 years of publication, it was a pleasure to produce knowing that it was appreciated around the world. Since I predicted the end, I have had several comments that it will be missed.

For this final edition, I stay away from my usual editorial policy and revisit three themes that have been constant from the start and have guided my practice from my early employment with Esso Petroleum and throughout my consulting career: the 3 'E's of Empowerment. Engagement and Employees - three interlinked and necessary fundamentals for leadership and management.

If you would like a downloadable pdf of this edition, it is published on my website, along with copies of all past editions, [click here](#).

Enjoy, and stay healthy and safe...

Geof Cox

Empowerment

One of the consistent themes in Cuttings, driven by the constant reminders of what motivates and drives success from empirical research, has been a plea for managers to empower their employees - and the first step means stopping disempowering them by micro-managing.

In the 1970s and 1980s empowerment focused on teams. Meredith Belbin did some seminal research which concluded that a team that was balanced in its decision making process would always out perform other groups that were not so well matched. This finding was put to great use in Total Quality Management and self-managed work teams that empowered workers to take control of their workplace and become highly motivated and productive. We saw that workers knew best how to carry out their roles and how to improve things - managers were too removed from the day-to-day to make meaningful suggestions, but

In this edition

Empowerment - a constant reminder to managers that getting out of the way makes for better results

Engagement - we didn't always call it engagement, but it has been a theme for some time.

Employees - staff are people not resources and unless we treat them as such there can be no empowerment or engagement

Plus, a collection of **Snippets** to further provoke your thinking and reflection, and details of **Book Sales** from our secure **Online Shop**

Snippets

A collection of thought provokers and quotations...

"The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary."

Vidal Sassoon

"Ask for what you want and be prepared to get it."

Maya Angelou

still insisted on being in control and making decisions. As soon as you got them out of the way, innovation and motivation increased.

Where managers did trust their staff, great results ensued, like the regional pharmaceutical sales VP who allowed his team total freedom on how to organise to deliver the next year's targets - no central cascade of targets to individuals and sales teams, the 30 person regional team worked together over an afternoon to identify how to play to their individual strengths and motivations. The VP was there not to make the decision but to authorise whatever the team came up with as the strategy. At the end of the year they were the only regional team in Europe that met their targets (and they did so under budget).

In another ground-breaking piece of work in Dundee, the Director of Social Work gave total freedom to his staff to work flexibly - they could work from any location, at any time to suit their needs; the only requirement was to deliver the agreed service level. The purpose was to improve the recruitment and retention of qualified social workers, the results went even further - lower levels of sickness absence, higher productivity, lower costs and high morale in what is classically a very stressful working environment. One community care team even managed to organise their work and cover for each other that they were able to offer spare hours to other local teams, demonstrating that flexible working and empowerment even works for 24/7 shift work.

The examples are numerous, and the HR and management press is full of stories like these, so why do we still need to promote empowerment? It should be built in to management practice by now. In my experience there are two key reasons: firstly, our corporate attention is on the short term rather than the longer term. Measures of performance are short term and therefore most are input related. In the Dundee example, the experiment was nearly de-railed by the team managers who found it difficult to move from managing Input (can I see people working hard) to managing output and outcome (are we achieving our goals). Managers used to immediate feedback find it difficult to wait to see an outcome before thinking that they need to do something. They take action, and thus undermine trust - which then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. We see this playing out in the remote working patterns that were introduced during COVID lockdowns - managers found it difficult to closely supervise staff working from home, and instead of trusting them and recognising that in most cases productivity and morale was increasing, they are insisting that staff return to offices where they can be seen to be "working".

The second reason lies in the preparation and training we give managers. Too many managers are still promoted from more junior roles without adequate development and are typically selected as they show technical competence rather than any aptitude for management. In the absence of any help with how to do their new role, people naturally rely on what got them the promotion - doing the technical job that they just left well. So they get in the way; interfere with the staff they should be supervising and micro-manage. The organisation then suffers a double whammy - they have just lost the best job holder they had and got a manager who can't do the job. And nothing is done about it as every other manager in the organisation is in the same position - the Peter Principle is alive and well and operating in most organisations today.

"Everything, and I repeat, everything had to swing."

Duke Ellington

"Creativity consists of rearranging what we know in order to find out what we don't know."

George Kneller

"Only when he no longer knows what he is doing does the painter do good things."

Edgar Degas

"Without play, learning and evolution are impossible. Play as free improvisation sharpens our capacity to deal with a changing world."

Stephen Nachmanovitch

"I always listen for what I can leave out."

Miles Davis

"To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination."

Albert Einstein

"Jazz is very democratic. It comes out of a communal experience. Everybody's allowed to be out front and everybody's supportive. Everybody's free."

Max Roach

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

Aristotle

"Experience is not what happens to you but it is what you make of what happens to you."

Aldous Huxley

"Out of intense complexities, intense simplicities emerge."

Winston Churchill

So, to capitalise on the lessons of empowerment that have been with us for over 30 years, we need to finally change the corporate dependency on short term measures to allow managers to trust their teams and give feedback on outcomes not inputs; and we need to promote on the basis of aptitude and ability to do the new job, and provide developmental support to help the transition from doer to manager

USEFUL LINKS

Empowerment has been a core focus for **New Directions** consultancy and training offers since the outset, and the designs and expertise we have built up are still available through our partners and associates who continue to be active. For more information [Click here](#)

"Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss it, you will land amongst the stars."

Les Brown

"Managing is not a series of mechanical tasks but a set of human interactions."

Thomas Teal

"The critical resource is now people and the knowledge they carry."

Arie de Geus

Engagement

According to every piece of research since Maslow and Herzberg first looked at motivation, engaged employees deliver higher productivity, have less time off for sickness, and are less likely to leave their employer than those who are not engaged. And without the trust in the workplace that comes from empowerment, there can be no engagement, so no growth or development.

Like empowerment, engagement has been a core theme for New Directions, and we have seen that it is the simple things that have been the key to success. No need for massive organisation change to improve the work culture and profitability, just get managers to implement some small improvements (often called 'common sense'!)

Dan Pink points out that people who use cognitive skills rather than purely mechanical skills in their jobs (ie most of the workers in today's workplace) want *autonomy* - to be left alone to get on with their job; *mastery* - to be able to develop and get better at what they do; and *purpose* - to see that what they do has value. Not a lot to ask for, but it seems that managers and organisations seem unable to satisfy these simple needs.

But, as we see with empowerment issues, managers continue to get in the way and micromanage their workers and not provide the autonomy that workers crave. Managers also fail to coach and develop workers to enable them to become better - they continue to focus on the negatives and correct faults and mistakes. We know, even from early child development, that saying 'Stop doing that' produces more of 'that' and the 'wrong' behaviour because there is no clear vision of what is 'right' or the 'correct' behaviour for them to focus on. Mastery requires a clear vision of what is required and support and coaching to achieve that and get better.

Much is still being written on purpose: now, more than ever since the COVID upheaval, people want to work for companies with missions and business philosophies that resonate with them intellectually and emotionally. They want to know why they are going to work each day. Simon Sinek's 2014 TED Talk on "Finding your why" is the third-most-watched of all time. The theme is simple, if there is no clear purpose to an organisation's activity or one that is not

Employees

Employees are people not resources - Charles Handy made this distinction back in the 1980s, but, judging by the ubiquitous HR departments, not many organisations seem to have followed his guidance. One of his observations when working for Shell was that the title of his new senior job in London was engraved into a brass plate on his (large) office door - his name was on a small plastic card that slid into a slot in the plate. The message was clear and simple, the job is important, but the holder is easily replaced.

This is the result of drawing organisation charts based on job roles not around what people can actually do. We are treating employees as resources not people.

When organisations think of their employees as resources, they lead managers to de-humanise the relationship so they will not work to build engagement or empowerment. Employees are controlled to fulfil the detailed instructions in their job descriptions and to follow rules and procedures. Any attempt to use their own brains or initiative is met with corrective action.

And we are even thinking this way in project based organisation structures where you would expect the strengths and individual contributions that potential project team members can make would be valued. Instead we

motivating to employees, the organisation has a problem. Just 'delivering shareholder value' has never been enough as an organisation purpose, just as 'do your job' has never been enough to get the best out of workers. We crave purpose and value - managers need to be able to deliver clear messages to workers that resonate with their values - which go beyond just delivering shareholder value.

I frequently quote the Gallup Q12™ items as a guide for managers to take action to ensure the conditions for engagement - none of it is rocket science, but it is amazing how many managers who have attended my workshops find this list does not match their daily management actions.

The Q^{12™}Items

- **I know what is expected of me at work.**
- **I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.**
- **At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.**
- **In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.**
- **My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.**
- **There is someone at work who encourages my development.**
- **At work, my opinions seem to count.**
- **The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.**
- **My associates (fellow employees) are committed to doing quality work.**
- **I have a best friend at work.**
- **In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.**
- **This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.**

THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION
PRINCETON

USEFUL LINKS

Like Empowerment, Engagement has been a core focus for **New Directions** the designs and expertise we have built up are still available through our partners and associates who continue to be active. For more information [Click here](#)

have 'resourcing managers' who direct where the project 'resources' are allocated with most of the focus on numbers and cost.

My own early experience in Esso was different in that we had an 'employee relations' department, not an HR department. The line manager was responsible for people management and we acted in an advisory capacity only. This led to a very different culture. People felt valued and had an identity with their manager and team - not to a 'resource manager'. I worked in a role where I was embedded in the business and advised the local management leaders on good practice - long before David Ulrich coined the term 'business partner'. Managers took responsibility for their people, built relationships and empowered their staff to fulfil a role description rather than follow a prescriptive job description.

We could do with more organisations ditching the HR department and putting responsibility for people back to the line manager where it belongs - without forgetting to provide adequate support and training. Then we will get engagement, empowerment and much more human workplaces.

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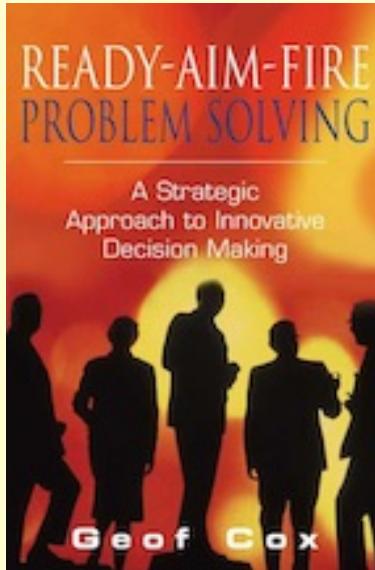
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Cuttings

Cuttings is a bi-monthly collection of ideas and comments published elsewhere which have attracted my attention over the past couple of months. It is designed for readers who are interested in individual, organisation and management development and is free.

Cuttings has been published continuously for more than 30 years by Geof Cox, formerly of New Directions - a international network of consultants and trainers who work together to learn, research, design and provide consulting and training in individual, management, and organisation development.

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