



Enriching the Job, Strengthening the Company

Sometimes it is good for us to remember a well-worn fact about going to work every day. The fact is that we'll spend more time over our lifetime at work than we will with any other aspect of our lives. That can be a sobering idea to contemplate. Once managers and supervisors have fully embraced that reality, they shift the way they think about the jobs they lead and the people doing those jobs.

Of course, there are a myriad of ways to shift the way we feel about our jobs. When that shift results in a greater commitment to the department or company goals, then we can look at going to work as a growth and learning opportunity.

Somewhere near the top of the list of ideas to increase employee commitment is a concept called job enrichment. The term is sometimes misunderstood and confused with job enlargement. Job enrichment is not simply adding more tasks for employees to do. Instead, it is the process of engaging employees to have more influence and control over their work.

Realistically, job enrichment isn't the magic elixir to increase all employees' motivation and performance. There is that population who want only to come to work, do the job they're told to do, do it well, and go home at quitting time. So long as the performance standards are met by those employees, then we're happy to have them.

But what about the voice of employees who are thinking with a future-oriented view, who try to improve procedures and practices they work with to contribute to the development of the company. There had to be the day when the people who made cassette players knew that their employment time may be drawing to a close. Those among them who embraced that reality as an opportunity were likely the ones who would lead the next endeavor.

We are aware of the work history of a young man, named Ray, who got hired as a janitor at a large busy airport. He was a hard worker, and soon his boss began to expand the janitor's span of control and responsibility. After a short time on the job, Ray approached his boss with a question, "Why do we buy smaller rolls of toilet paper that need to be replenished so often?" he asked. "Whatever savings we might think we're seeing from that purchase is wasted by the labor costs to change the rolls so often. Last night I did a little research on the internet, and found that many other airports had converted their bathrooms to the much larger rolls and the cost of the conversion was recovered in just four months, resulting in significant savings."

Perhaps this may not be the contribution we'd expect from a young, newly hired janitor. Yet, here he was, thinking about his job, the impact on the company, and a way to save money. His manager had the good sense to send him to the purchasing department with his data. He

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wasn't given a raise or promotion, but his fellow staff members were impressed. He became the informal leader of the group, and the members began to think about their jobs in a broader way. Ray's example isn't technically job enrichment, because it was done almost independently of his manager.

The whole point of enhancing the meaningfulness of jobs for employees is recognizing that many employees are fully willing to learn new tasks and grow. It is common for those of us who

deliver conflict management or interpersonal communication training to see participants become excited about applying the new skills at home or other places outside of their workplace. The concept that broader life skills can come from their jobs is often eye opening for many employees. One result is a healthier view of their employer and a greater commitment to their strongest effort. Organizations are live organic entities whose life blood is their workforce. The healthier that workforce is, the present and future for the organization is more assured.

