

# Notes from Duke's Casebook

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## About the 2<sup>nd</sup> Volume

*Halfway through the decade.*

It's taken longer to get the next edition out, but I'd rather send one full of useful things than pepper you with more spam. The theme this time is pretty clear: make smarter decisions.

No promises when the next one will be published. Again, if you like it, please share it with others; I'll add their names to my mailing list. If you don't want it, I'll take you off.

If you didn't receive last years' editions and you would both, just send an email and I'll send them back to you.

Duke Kuehn  
April 28, 2005

## MAKING INCREDIBLY EFFECTIVE DECISIONS

Ever wonder why so few decisions are fully implemented? It's not motivation, communication or any other managerial ploy you might imagine. Decisions aren't implemented because they are poorly made and the process more often than not excludes those whose support is most needed to get the job done.

The problem's source is the decision-maker

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2** Great burgers, from Guam to Manhattan
- 2** This edition's quotation..
- 3** Dealing with people who try to dominate meetings.
- 3** Duke's Rule #11: My favorite is not yours!
- 4** Kathleen Larkin-Kuehn: Profiles in Leadership!

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You can copy this and share it all you want, just tell folks where you found it. Thanks, Duke

## Mutual Respect, the Key to Effective Leadership

*Aretha had it right. Great leaders create organizations where respect is reflected in every decision. Consideration, not authority, builds effective teams.*

Inevitably the idea comes up when I'm working on a strategic plan these days: respect. Owners, employees, clients, even vendors tell me they don't feel respected; they believe their opinions are ignored or overlooked, their efforts are discounted or exploited or their needs are consistently put second to someone else's.

It's not a healthy situation. Those who feel disrespected, whatever their role in your organization, come to work frustrated, struggle with motivation all day long and their discontent surely affects everyone around them. The disturbing part, I've observed, is that most of these incidents of disrespect are avoidable misunderstandings prompted by poor communication.

I'm gong to isolate the most common forms of workplace disrespect and identify some effective remedies to prevent them. Creating an environment of respect is part of leadership and it is just as important to do things the right way as it is to do the right thing.

What is respect? Pretty simply respect means sincerely paying attention to the people you work with and treating them in a considerate manner. The idea is hardly more complicated than what your mom told you the first day of kindergarten: be nice!

What goes wrong?

*Continued on page 3*

**Remarks** *continued from page 1*

confuses the authority to make the decision with the need to consult others in the process. Bad decision-makers simply cut themselves off from useful information that would lead them to a better choice and, in the process, marginalize the involvement of the implementers from the start.

To make great decisions, one's that are well informed and have a real chance of being implemented, follow this rule of thumb:

*Everyone is involved in the decision-making process to the degree their interest, expertise and authority allow.*

Some key points here. You (or you and some group) have the authority. That's fine... I agree, that's what you're paid to do. But part of making a great decision is collecting the right data, establishing options, weighing your choices in terms of valid criteria. All of that information is abundant if you seek the opinions of those who are interested or expert. You are not giving up your power to make decisions, you are showing the wisdom to learn from others what a great decision might look like.

Asking implementers beforehand is a great way to discover hidden pitfalls, and potential shortcuts. It also helps employees get ready for whatever the decision involves.

*It is far better to start with buy in than to have*

**I Really Wish I'd Said This:** Disney both attracted and then disposed of an extraordinary group of senior executives--any one of who might well have proven a worthy successor to Eisner. *James B. Stewart, Disneywar, Simon and Shuster, 2005, page 533.*

**Why:** Getting talent is one thing, retraining it is another. Eisner's brilliance brought the best to work with him, his inability to treat them honestly and considerately drove them away to companies like Comcast, Dreamworks, Pixar, the very competitors whose performance stunted Disney's dominance. When the Disney board woke up they discovered a key lesson: leaders who believe they are superior to those they lead soon find their flaws and limitations exposed by the people who leave.

## The Strategic Gourmand: Burger in Paradise (or closer)

**I cannot pass up a cheeseburger. It is a sign of divine providence that grilled ground beef, cheese and bread found their way together. A little mayo, a crisp piece of lettuce, a fresh Bermuda onion and a good roll make it perfect.**

**Great burgers abound, my favorites by category.**

**Juiciest Mess: Kalapaki Beach Hut, Nawiliwili, Kauai, Hawai'i.** *A bit far to go but worth every mile. Absolutely dripping with delectable gooeyness from really juicy Maui beef, all sorts of flavors but a big bun to hold it all in. Of course, the hint of a little teriyaki glaze gives a nice Asian twist to the mainland mainstay.*

**Best Airport: Billy Goat Tavern, C Concourse, O'Hare, Chicago.** *An outpost of the famous SNL "Cheezeborger, no Pepsi!" place downtown. Can't get much simpler than this, good Midwest beef on a toasted Kaiser roll. Almost makes flying through ORD worthwhile.*

**Best Chain: Red Robin.** *If you have to eat a chain burger, this is a good one. Lots of interesting combinations. For true students of the hamburger, this is a great place for R & D. (Beware the soul-crushing birthday song, however).*

**Best Fastfood: Don't even ask but if you must... Burgerville, This is a wonderful regional chain around Portland, OR, that's worth a try. The Walla Walla sweet onion rings, served only in season, are top notch.**

**Best Exotic: DB Bistro Moderne, 55 W. 44<sup>th</sup>, Manhattan.** *A \$30 burger? You bet. If you take into account the service and the ambience, it may be worth it. C'mon, when the last time you had a burger patty made of ground sirloin filled with braised short ribs, foie gras and black truffles?*

**Far away, but a true cheeseburger in Paradise, Jeff's Pirate Cove, Ipan, Talafofo, Guam.** *It has to be the local onions. This one is simple, cooked to perfection and in as far away spot as you can find. The shrimp are great, too.*

## The Facilitator's Creativity Toolbox

Two consistent problems in group facilitation are the people who speak too much and those who speak too little. Both threaten effective group communication, one by dominating discussions, the other by eliminating the possibility for discussion altogether.

There is an obvious strategy for making sure they end up making useful contributions to group discussion, but we forget it: substitute writing for talking.

Most exercises where people talk can be converted to writing. Tell the group to take a moment, write down their answer to a question you've posed to the group. Prompt them as to how much to write (a couple of sentences, a phrase or two, maybe some descriptive words) and set a time limit (1 to 5 minutes). When done, each person reads what they have written, without elaboration unless there are following questions or comments. The talkers are disciplined, the quiet ones are forced to come out of hiding.

Remember, people act as they do in groups for a reason. Most often the "Dominator" craves attention because he or she either feels they will not be heard or what they say won't be given proper consideration. The quiet person often has something to hide. He or she fears that their opinions or inarticulate manner will expose them to criticism or ridicule.

Use ground-rules to establish the right dynamic from the start and the eager sharers will be reassured and the cautious will feel safe.

### Duke's Rule #11: My favorite is not yours.

**It is the ultimate conceit, but we all engage in thinking that what we find interesting, valuable, tasty or funny is perceived the same way by others. Managers violate this rule all the time thinking that employees are motivated by the same things they are.**

**Keep in mind that people like and need to be paid in their own currency. You may like praise, I may like dollars and she may like pesos, all for the same thing.**

**Violating this rule leads to really poor decisions. Assuming that you want, like and need what I do leads me to make decisions without consulting you and forces me to try, after the fact, to justify it by asserting I took your opinion into account.**

**You wouldn't want someone to pick what kind of car you drive or food you eat. Ask what others think, you often will be pleasantly surprised.**

## Respect

*continued from page 1*

The most common forms of disrespect I find are:

- ❖ Unilateral decision-making.
- ❖ Failure to share rewards.
- ❖ Twisted humor.

It comes down to this in every instance: disrespect occurs whenever someone engages in the vanity of believing their opinions, values and sense of humor are the same as everyone else's.

Some classic managerial examples:

- ❖ Announcing changes in employee policy made with *no* consultation with staff. Disrespectful? The manager is telling staff, I, with my superior knowledge, know, what's best for you.
- ❖ Manager writes a memo to superiors outlining a recommendation that really came out of a staff meeting. Disrespect? I'm the boss, I take credit for everything good that happens on my watch.
- ❖ An executive begins a meeting with a joke that demeans someone else. Disrespect? If it's funny to me it's obviously funny to you.

These are the winners. Close seconds include playing favorites in the office, demanding that subordinates do special services for you and routinely breaking rules you enforce with others.

It all comes back to the same thing... disrespect sends the message that you are better than someone else and, as a manager or executive, your rank carries with it the privilege to treat other's ideas and opinions as less valuable or important than your own.

In fairness when I help to correct these offensive acts, I learn the manager meant well and he or she is truly surprised to learn employees feel disrespected. "I didn't mean to do that," however, may be a valid excuse, but a pretty worthless explanation.

*continued on page 4*

## Respect

*continued from page 3*

These transgressions make managers look bad, their ultimate impact is to undercut trust, loyalty and motivation. Obviously these problems must be avoided, but how?

The remedies are simple, basic and commonsensical, so much so we routinely forget to employ them.

First, practice humility. Every manager, even a first-time, first level one, is totally dependent and always in debt to the hard work of his or her employees. No one ever wins all by themselves. When managers looks in the mirror, they should see a reflection of all the people standing behind them.

Second, authority does not equal intelligence, creativity, morality or refined humor. Maybe it should, but it doesn't unless you set those standards for yourself. It is wiser to recognize that those who work with you are superior in their own way and, if you are very lucky, they are able to do some things better than you. You are a steward of these talents and you cannot do too much to acknowledge, reward and support those you lead.

Third, don't assume, ask. Asking questions is a way of collecting data. No one ever looks weak or indecisive when they do research prior to a decision. Of course, you are accountable for making the decision, but you want to do so by relying upon people whose different points of view carry their own wisdom.

Fourth, always take your piece of pizza last. Make sure your employees are cared for before yourself.

Fifth, recognize people for who they are. Employees are so much more than human resources. Their lives are as full as yours and being interested in them and their families is not just a courtesy, it is a recognition of what's really important: our common humanity.

Sixth, say please and thank you EVERY time.

Build respect every day, that's your responsibility as a leader.

## Profiles in Leadership: Kathleen Larkin-Kuehn

Okay, okay. It's *my* newsletter and nepotism is not a problem here. My wife is an extraordinary leader and I want to acknowledge some lessons I've learned from her.

A banker who worked with Security Pacific, Seattle Trust and KeyBank (most recently Rainier Pacific) she has developed a management style built almost totally on coaching.

The idea that a team is built by having a manager working closely with team members, literally coaching them through achievement of corporate and personal goals is an idea bounced around in the most innovative management discussions. Kathleen has actually figured out how to do it and created effective and efficient models that increase performance.

The key to her success has been restructuring the role of manager both in terms of duties and time. Kathleen sets aside specific times each week for one-on-one meetings with each of her team members and each meeting is formatted to address a specific goal and moving towards it achievement.

Coached goals may be team achievements or the acquisition of a new skill or level of personal performance. No micro-managing is allowed. Kathleen asks questions, inquires about strategies and shares things she had seen work. The recipients learn, stretch and achieve more, often drawing from Kathleen's wisdom to finds ways to success.

She's a great wife and partner, too.

IDEAS?                      SUGGESTIONS?  
COMMENTS?

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