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Getting People to Agree

Managing by Influence—*Kenneth Schatz and Linda Schatz*

The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict—*Christopher W. Moore*

In the last several years, autocratic management structures across the nation have fallen like dominos, a trend welcomed—and exacerbated—by many human resource development practitioners. But management productivity dropped precipitously in the same period, fueling speculation that the cure for dictatorial executive power produced side effects which now threaten organizational competitiveness. This may be so, although, even in such a well-publicized case as People Express Airlines, drawing a direct connection between modern, non-autocratic management methods and business failure proves difficult, if not impossible. The complex operations of large organizations resist airtight conclusions. Examining the competitiveness of a nation full of big companies in an era of rapid change becomes almost hopelessly speculative.

But the problem for managers in any era is not a question of why things work the way they do but of how to get things done. In this regard, attention should be paid to two recent books because they accept the new business methods rather than waste precious time in the vale of abstract corporate physics: *Managing by Influence*, by Kenneth Schatz and Linda Schatz, and *The Mediation Process*, by Christopher W. Moore. Both books may also help managers hold onto their jobs in an era of corporate downsizing. (The Conference

Board predicts that American business' already thinning management ranks will be cut an additional 7.2 percent by the year 2000.)

Managers who rely only on the strength of their authority usually encounter resistance and end up on the road to frustration. How to avoid creating resistance without hurting productivity is the question the Schatzes' management-by-influence (MBI) seeks to answer. The principle behind MBI was well articulated in an article management consultant Kenneth M. Schatz recently wrote for *Training* magazine. In it, Schatz identified evoking commitment from employees as a manager's primary role: "The secret competitive advantage these days is human resources, and authoritarian management styles don't make the most of them.

"In fact, with the growing competition for good people, particularly creative people who will 'own' their work, management must not leave commitment to chance."

MBI, then, is a method "to evoke the commitment that already lives" in a manager's people.

Case studies of corporations where the Schatzes see MBI working, the "real world" heart of the book, illustrate that big companies aren't automatically impersonal places to work. They also demonstrate that the benevolent paternalism practiced by those companies' founders and their heirs does not equal authoritarianism. Giant Food, J.W. Marriott, and Hughes Aircraft, among others the Schatzes cite, all successfully encourage a "family" atmosphere among their employees without sacrificing profits. Clearly, that kind of climate does not come easy and cannot be created overnight in a company merely by employing MBI. But it's not hard to see how an individual manager could improve his or her department by increasing employee commitment.

One of the most interesting points the Schatzes make is that "you can never not lead." Everything a manager does and everything a manager doesn't do makes an impact. "You lead by acts of *commission*, and you lead by acts of *omission*."

"In fact, your best acts of commission

may be completely undone by your acts of omission."

The Schatzes recommend a simple self-assessment for managers to determine the kind of influence they have with their subordinates. "Ask yourself:

- After I've delegated authority, do I often feel that I've lost control over the work?

- While I understand in principle that the small things I do may have a big effect, am I uncertain how this works in specific cases?

- If a situation can't be resolved without heavy use of authority, do I just let it go and tolerate it?"

MBI probably won't work for managers unaccustomed to or unwilling to practice a little self-reflection—the people who may need it most.

Conflict: biting the bullet

If MBI is the preferred mode of managing in today's non-authoritarian organizations, does this mean we have seen an end to conflict? A quick look at the newspaper should provide the answer: conflict remains an inevitable, if distasteful, part of all human interaction. But, although conflict is a natural part of our relationships, whether on the personal level, within organizations, between communities or even societies, few possess the skill to solve conflicts consistently.

One expert unmystified by the conflict resolution process is Christopher W. Moore. A skilled mediator, says Moore, can bring people together even when strong emotions are involved, communication is poor, hidden interests sidetrack negotiations, and negative behavior creates barriers.

The Mediation Process, accurately described as a practical guide to settling disputes, reflects the hands-on experience of the author. A partner in the Center for Dispute Resolution in Denver, Moore primarily has worked in the resolution of community, domestic, housing, criminal, business, organizational, and environmental disputes. In addition, he has developed training programs in mediation and run seminars in national resource conflict management.

A lot has been written about the mediation process, but few, if any, books provide the kind of how-to infor-

mation found in Moore's. According to him, there are several reasons for the dearth of practical advice:

- "Many mediators believe that their practice is closer to an art form and have been reluctant to encourage, or have actively resisted, systemic study of what they do."
- Many mediators consider their skills or moves to be "secrets, that if revealed to the public, would render them less effective."

■ The confidentiality "of the subject matter that the people in conflict discuss and the confidentiality of the mediation process itself" both inhibit careful analysis.

■ Researchers have trouble inserting themselves "into highly polarized, multiple-party disputes where the acceptability and presence of 'neutral' third parties is itself controversial."

■ Negotiation—not mediation—has been the traditional focus of conflict

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studies.

■ The mediation "process encompasses a variety of skills and is practiced in so many different ways that researchers have encountered difficulties in focusing on such a comprehensive process."

The clue to what the mediation process actually does is contained above. Moore describes it as "the intervention into a dispute or negotiation by an acceptable, impartial, and neutral third party who has no authoritative decision-making power to assist disputing parties in voluntarily reaching their own mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute." Quite a mouthful, but, then, practicing mediation itself requires a lot of chewing.

Just getting to the point where a mediator is called into a dispute means the contending parties have talked themselves blue in the face without reaching agreement. Moore quotes labor mediator Theodore Kheel's description of the difficulty of one party to a dispute even asking for a mediator: "If you've reached an impasse, it can be assumed that both sides have put forth what they claim will be their final offers.

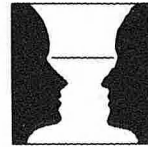
"In that situation a proposal by one side or the other to bring in a mediator is obviously a signal that that side is willing to go still further."

One study showed that people engaged in interpersonal or community disputes actually refuse mediation services at a rate of 48 percent. Moore and other researchers attribute such rejection to "(1) unfamiliarity with the process, (2) rigid adherence to a win-lose approach to dispute resolution, (3) intense emotions that block communication, and (4) habitual attachment to judicial means of dispute settlement."

Successful mediators are people who *enjoy* stepping into mine-laden territory. But, writes Moore, "Regardless of how a mediator enters a dispute, he or she must accomplish certain specific intervention tasks.

"These include (1) building personal, institutional, and procedural credibility; (2) establishing rapport with the disputants; (3) educating participants about the negotiation process, the role of the mediator, and the function of mediation; and (4) gaining a commitment to begin mediating."

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It should be obvious that Moore's writing style can be characterized as "textbook." But mediators have never been accused of being glamorous, and their work doesn't lend itself to an entertaining treatment. Exciting accounts of major negotiations invariably focus on the disputants, the personality of the mediator rarely making for good copy. And this is as it should be, since the mediator, whose primary characteristic is neutrality, has been called to deflate the situation's passions and speed resolution. Negotiations break down when the mediator takes center stage.

Perhaps lack of public interest in mediation can be attributed to the anti-dramatic nature of the process. Moore suggests that "for mediation to achieve widespread application as a means of dispute resolution, several changes need to occur. First, the public needs to be educated about the viability of mediation.

"Second, more research needs to be conducted on mediation formats, procedures, strategies, and tactics, and more information is needed about what mediators do that enables parties to manage intense emotional multi-party conflicts, imbalances of power, and communications problems.

"Third, participants in conflicts, mediators, and other professionals need to search for new types of conflicts in which mediation can be applied.

"Finally, mediation must become institutionalized. Mediation has for too long been conducted on an ad hoc basis."

Moore's text, in itself, begins the educational process on sound footing.

Managing by Influence. 252 pp. \$19.95.
Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632.

The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict. 400 pp. \$4.95.
Jossey-Bass, Inc., 433 California St., San Francisco, CA 94104.

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