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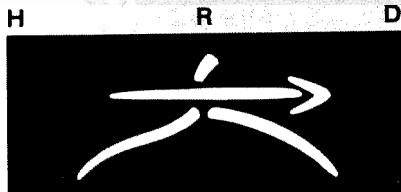
Labor/Management Cooperation

By Debra A. Dinnocenzo

For an organization to make it in today's competitive marketplace, management and organized labor must be partners in the business, not adversaries. Successful labor/management cooperation requires effective partnership skills, long-term commitment, and ongoing education.

Throughout the United States, new, cooperative partnerships are emerging between organized labor and management. Rooted primarily in economic imperative, the methods of achieving such partnerships are variable and the results, diverse. Clearly, not all efforts at labor/management cooperation have achieved the desired success. The missing link? Effective partnership skills. To work together to develop a workforce and a work environment prepared to meet the challenges of the year 2000 and beyond, labor and management must be equipped with effective partnership skills.

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... A Look Into the Future

Why labor/management cooperation?

Why are leaders of management and labor across the United States moving toward partnership and cooperation in their approach to working with each other? What external changes mandate that organizations find new ways to ensure survival and prosperity? As one union leader explained in *Management Review*, "If we don't take this on now, we're not being effective, and we can't represent our people, or identify with the changes they're seeing. It's very easy to keep our old perspectives, and think that everything will stay the same as it was for 30 years. But it is guaranteed that things will not stay the same for the next 30 years."

In many industries the change in the relationship between labor and management has been so massive that the emerging cooperation is understandable. What is happening is not a mystery—it is competition at work. Businesses today face greater competitive pressures than at any time in this century—certainly any time since the 1930s and '40s when the framework of our present labor/management relations system was constructed.

Increasingly, case studies show that cooperation between labor and management is critical to the survival of both companies and unions. The desire to survive seems to be the catalyst for cooperation and participation efforts. According to one United Auto Workers union local president quoted in *U.S. News & World Report*, "Job security is the only game in town. Team concept is a matter of survival."

Wherever partnership, involvement, or cooperative efforts have succeeded, labor and management recognize that to prosper in a changing, increasingly competitive environment they need to change the way people relate to one another. Labor and management professionals are realizing that cooperative labor systems are more productive than adversarial ones, that worker involvement increases productivity and morale, and that job breadth and versatility can be good for both employer

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and employee. The external forces that produce change in the business environment precipitate change in the relationships between labor and management. With a joint effort, the chances for prosperity are multiplied.

What is labor/management cooperation?

Labor/management cooperation is a set of principles that embraces basic values. It is a philosophy that values people as the most important resource in the organization, a philosophy that all people should be treated with dignity and respect, a philosophy that believes employees are responsible, trustworthy, and capable of making valuable contributions.

Labor/management cooperation encompasses a variety of involvement and participation efforts, including specific programs such as employee involvement, quality of work life, auton-

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omous work teams, quality circles, labor/management participation teams, and team concepts. Such programs systematically involve workers in aspects of problem solving on issues affecting their jobs. Shop-floor meetings and discussion groups are typical participative activities, and many involve workers in varying degrees in day-to-day decision making.

One fundamental ingredient of a successful partnership program is a commitment to the philosophy of cooperation by both labor and management. Long-term success requires long-term commitment. As Donald F. Ephlin, head of the UAW for General Motors, said in an article in *Business Week*, "This is an ongoing process, not a one-shot deal."

Another critical ingredient is a strong foundation of ongoing education and skill building. The following components are integral to any comprehensive labor/management coope-

ration program: joint education, shared objectives, skill determination, and skill development.

Joint Education

If employees and union members are expected to be committed to a cooperative effort, they must have a part in helping the company define a productivity-driven business. That requires a company commitment to educating managers and employees on such issues as

- industry trends;
- the business environment;
- competitive challenges;
- the changing roles of labor and management;
- visions of the future;
- the immediate impact of joint education.

Shared Objectives

Labor and management must recognize their shared objectives through facilitated discussions with third parties, and principled, good-faith negotiations. Consensus is important on such objectives as

- how decision making will be shared;
- how gains will be shared;
- how a secure future will be created together.

Skill Determination

There are many parallels between the new skills and attitudes that union leaders and company executives must develop to be effective in joint labor/management collaboration. Union leaders and executives are both on new ground; both must learn new behaviors as they take a more collaborative view of decision making. The transitional activities of both will have new (and sometimes misinterpreted) ramifications down the line. Before critical partnership skills can be developed, it is necessary to define the skills required for the new roles of managers, union leaders, and employees.

Managers accustomed to acting decisively and presenting full-blown plans need to learn the patience that participative consensus-building requires. They also need to learn to present half-formed ideas for discussion before making decisions.

For union leaders, the change is equally significant. A joint labor/management forum requires union leaders to shift their orientation from

direct service to their constituents to the shaping of policy, and from a stance of opposition to one of involvement. In a *Management Review* article on the reinvention of traditional leadership roles, a Communications Workers union leader commented, "Before, if we didn't like decisions, we just complained. It was very easy, very comfortable; anyone could do that. Now, we must make advance decisions, exercise judgment, and live with it, which is much harder and places much more responsibility on the unions."

As both labor and management seek greater cooperation and participation, new skill areas critical to the overall success of cooperation efforts continue to emerge. Development Dimensions International (DDI) has conducted extensive research on more than 30 organizations that employ a "team approach." Based on interviews, surveys, and critical-incident analyses involving more than 1,000 people (both labor and management), DDI identified these skills as critical for team members:

- problem identification;
- problem solving;
- the ability to learn;

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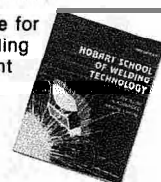
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- communication;
- job motivation;
- attention to detail;
- initiative;
- high work standards;
- coaching;
- technical ability.

For team leaders, DDI research concluded that the skills listed above, as well as the following skill areas, are critical to success:

- individual leadership;
- group leadership;
- analysis;
- judgment;
- delegation;
- control;
- motivation.

Skill Development

Once skills are identified, a strategy for developing them must be devised. In planning targeted training, assessing current skill levels may be appropriate. In light of the recent changing roles of labor and management, today's labor/management cooperation programs must go beyond mere awareness of critical skills to real skill development.

How are partnership skills developed?

The traditional behaviors of management and union leaders have been well learned and strongly reinforced over many years. Any effort to change them must be comprehensive, must emphasize skill development, and must recognize the degree of change necessary.

Understanding the nuances of change for union and management leaders is also critical. The new role for a union's local president means that the contracted or tacit "rules" of operation no longer provide an objective, black-and-white standard. Much more rests on the exercise of judgment and how the president relates to local constituents. Management must plan for the impact of change throughout the organizational structure. As with the union, redefining the roles of top company leaders sends ripples through the entire organization, opening up the need to invent new roles, particularly for middle management.

Subsequently, the invention of new organizational roles requires role and skills definition. First-line supervisors need to learn the skills of team leadership that will allow their employees to become fully functioning team mem-

bers and, in time, bona fide partners.

"It used to be that the majority of hourly workers were expected to come to the factory, leave their brains in their lockers, and then go to work," says Richard Wellins, senior vice president of DDI in *Fortune*. But today, "most blue-collar jobs require thinking, responsibility, and participation."

To develop critical partnership skills, all organization members must become competent in the following skill areas: interactive, innovation, teamwork, issue-resolution, and reinforcement and feedback.

Interactive Skills

Interactive skills enable partners to communicate effectively and positively. They are as vital to success on the job as technical and job-specific skills. Videotapes and interactive practice exercises can help members of labor and management learn to work together to develop the following interactive skills:

- **The ability to maintain and enhance self-esteem.** The dictionary describes self-esteem as "a good opinion of oneself." Everyone needs to feel important and valued by others. People who feel valued are apt to be motivated, productive, and cooperative, and will be committed to working with those around them to solve problems. Enhanced self-esteem encourages open communication and strengthens the commitment of both parties.

- **The ability to listen and respond with empathy.** Listening is at the heart of two-way communication. Empathy is an understanding of what another person is feeling. Combined, they create a very useful tool for encouraging people to really communicate. Listening and understanding go a long way toward ensuring open, productive interactions. If labor leaders know management is listening, and vice versa, everyone will be motivated to contribute important, useful information. The more information parties share, the better they will be at analyzing a situation and working together toward the desired result.

- **The ability to ask for help in solving a problem.** Asking people for their ideas on how to solve problems often results in good suggestions, enhanced self-esteem, and increased participation and commitment. When people are asked for their ideas, they take more positive approaches to problem solv-

ing, especially if their ideas are eventually used.

■ **The ability to provide support without removing responsibility for action.** People need to know that although their efforts are supported, they are ultimately responsible for their own actions. People quickly lose motivation when they no longer have responsibility to take action or to make a difference. If labor knows that management supports change, but changes that are made on the shop floor make no measurable difference, then change is not likely to happen. People must be encouraged and rewarded for taking responsibility, and they need to know they are trusted to do well. When people are responsible for their own actions, they are more likely to take initiative, to be more creative, and to work "smarter."

Innovation Skills

Innovation and creativity skills promote flexible and fluent thinking. If participative work environments are to exist, people need the tools to prepare for and promote change. Through a series of discussions and interactive exercises, people can learn techniques for flexible and fluent thinking. Naturally, creative thinking involves looking at situations from others' perspectives and developing different approaches to issues. Guidelines for introducing change:

- Be flexible with ideas—"switch gears" frequently and aim for variety.
- Be open to problem-solving suggestions.
- Ask questions.
- "Work" with an idea—modify and enhance it, rather than judge it.
- Use lists as thinking resources.
- Imagine alternatives.
- Be objective.

The innovation-skills guidelines are used initially in abstract situations and then in on-the-job situations, which provide opportunities for real problem solving.

Teamwork Skills

Interactive skills and innovation skills are used in team situations to meet team objectives. Team situations provide opportunities to develop the awareness and skills necessary for effective teamwork. In joint training sessions, management and labor practice interactive skills and apply innovative-thinking techniques to typical day-to-day challenges (such

as lowering costs, responding to customer needs, rewarding customer-oriented behavior, maximizing people's talents, and increasing cooperation and openness to change.)

Issue-Resolution Skills

Another key ingredient in a well-established partnership between labor and management is the ability to resolve issues. That ability reinforces learned partnership skills and is an important indicator of the integration of partnership skills into an organization's culture. In a successful enterprise, positive ideas as well as complaints must have an avenue of address. The procedures to address such matters need not be adversarial, expensive, slow, formal, or destructive of supervisor/employee relationships.

There are five basic principles for resolving issues:

- Attack the issues, not the people.
- Talk about what you really want.
- Find ways to achieve what both parties want.
- Judge solutions by objective standards.
- Know your best alternative agreement.

All members of an organization must understand the basic principles of issue resolution and their benefits. Issue-resolution skills should be learned and practiced in the classroom so members of both labor and management can engage in the process. The following guidelines can help in resolving issues effectively:

- Determine the interests behind the issues.
- Raise issues in constructive ways.
- Exchange information and ideas.
- Consider everyone's interests and perspectives.
- Develop alternative solutions.
- Agree on resolutions, actions, and follow-up methods.

Issue-resolution skills provide a common and constructive approach when setting shared objectives, relating to each other, engaging in non-adversarial problem solving, and finding "win-win" solutions. The skills are used in handling problems, issues, concerns, complaints, and grievances, as well as in addressing opportunities for change, improvement, and innovation. Based on the premise that everyone is responsible for making things work, issue resolution is designed to avoid the rigidity of the traditional union grievance procedures and management "by the book." It is geared toward finding positive solutions for the future



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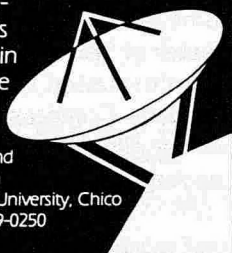
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rather than focusing on past rule
disputes.

Reinforcement and Feedback Skills

Not only must partnership skills be learned, they must be applied and reinforced. The success of any partnership effort is directly proportionate to the effectiveness of the reinforcement, modeling, and feedback provided by leaders. So, it is vital that labor and management leaders are equipped with key reinforcement and feedback skills. The specific skills required may vary, but reviewing and strengthening basic day-to-day leadership skills often helps in developing effective reinforcement and feedback skills.

Although specific organization designs will differ, common elements of the reinforcement and feedback skill component include

- The ability to develop collaborative relationships. This skill enables leaders of labor and management to identify opportunities for using collaborative skills with team members, peers, subordinates, or bosses.
- The ability to coach for success. This skill involves raising a team member's competence and confidence level through giving advice and input, identifying coaching opportunities, and enhancing that team member's success.
- The ability to reinforce effective performance. Reinforcement means motivating people by recognizing their performance, showing appreciation for a job well done, and building on effective current performance to enhance future performance.


Making cooperation a reality

To be successful, partnership and cooperation efforts must go beyond the mutual desire of management and labor to be participative. Both must use their partnership skills to establish and maintain positive working relationships for the future.

The key to future success in relations between unions and management lies in the philosophy of and the commitment to cooperation. A cooperative labor/management stance will lead to improved quality and increased productivity; an adversarial stance will lead only to discord and divisiveness. If labor and management will stop competing and instead learn to cooperate, American industry will be better equipped to be competitive in the international marketplace.

The preliminary steps being taken in

the realm of labor/management cooperation are encouraging, but much remains to be accomplished. "As meaningful as our successes have been, we must not delude ourselves into thinking we are anywhere but at the beginning," said Lynn Williams, international president of the United Steelworkers union, in the *Pittsburgh Business Times-Journal*. "Our greater task lies ahead, against formidable opposition."

Management and labor leaders must begin with a shared vision and strive to create an environment that fosters cooperation. The architecture of that environment is as essential as the foundation of partnership skills in transforming the vision into reality. 

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