

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

SOME PERSONAL PAYOFFS OF TEAM BUILDING

Guest Commentary
BY WILLIAM CROCKETT

I have been a manager for more than 40 years, the first two-thirds of which I did the "hard way," i.e. without OD.

For the past 15 years I have tried very hard to manage people, work with people, and relate to people using the concepts of organizational development. Using these principles has helped me, not only to be a more effective manager, but a more effective person as well. I would like to share with you my perceptions of how OD has helped me to be a more successful manager.

1. *I will hear more.*

In order for me to be successful in my job, I must know what's going on, what went wrong, and what potential problems are coming up. I must know what customers think about our products and our services and what they want that we aren't giving them. I can't afford to be kept in the dark, and I'm not helped when my subordinates — or family — pull a "Watergate" on me. I need the facts in order to make decisions, to make plans and to stay on a productive track. I don't want surprises that throw me off balance or catch me off guard so that I become defensive.

What behavior will help me?

- As a boss, I can and must help to reduce the barrier of fear that exists between me and my subordinates by holding OD team-building meetings. This helps to break the sound barrier so that people will talk and listen.



William Crockett

- As a boss, I can learn to keep myself mentally, emotionally and physically accessible to my subordinates, and I must make it a two-way street by walking their way more often than they walk mine.

- I can learn to listen. To listen without filters, without judging, without fault-finding and without punishing. And, after I have listened, I can learn not to work the problem myself that was started by someone else.

- I can make others feel that I genuinely care and am concerned about everything that is of concern to the people who work for me. I can let others see by my behavior that I won't belittle their ideas and

dismiss their suggestions as being of no importance to me, even though they may be different from my ideas and contain values which I don't understand or with which I may not agree.

- I can learn not to raise hell — punish them with my anger — when they tell me about a mistake or problem, but can openly tell them how I do feel about it.

- I can make plain to people what I believe in, and at the same time I must make it easy and okay for the others to be different in their own beliefs and value systems — they can be good guys too — even if they don't agree with my view of work, the world, and life.

- I must follow up on commitments so that no credibility gap exists between what I promise and what I do.

- I can learn to be open with my subordinates about the way I feel and about my own concerns. I must also express the genuine need I have for their help, feedback and support, and my need to be of help to them.

- I can learn to give feedback that is tough, but do it in a way that is not harsh and hurtful.

- I can learn that to show that I really care, I must be honest and not hide the truth from people.

When I have learned to behave in ways that make all or some of these things happen and not just talk about them, then I'll hear more because people will know

that it is normal behavior.

2. *I will (can) learn more useful things about myself.*

In order to be a successful leader and manager, I must be effective with myself and with the people who work for me. I must teach myself and them, direct myself and them, and motivate myself and them in order to get the work done effectively.

Some of this I can learn from books, some from bosses, some from peers, and some in school, but the very best place to learn it is from the people who work for me. They know me better than anyone except my spouse. They have rich data about me which, if shared, will help me to become more effective with myself as a person, and with them as a manager.

They can give me more data about myself than my boss can because they know how I come across to them. The problem is that my asking them for their data won't cause them to give it to me because they may be afraid of me — afraid to risk my defensiveness, my anger, my displeasure and my punishment if they tell me something that isn't flattering to me. So they'll tell me the nice platitudes that are safe for them and meaningless for me.

How can I get their *real* data?

- I can learn to share with them my own concerns and my need for their help — and, if I am seen as being genuine and sincere, I'll start getting some feedback from them.

- I'll practice being less defensive and more open, inquiring, accepting when people, especially my subordinates, give me feedback.

- I'll practice thanking people for their feedback and meaning it.

- I'll practice listening to people fully — rather than listening to prepare my own comeback.

- I'll practice doing something about changing myself and my behavior when they give me feedback.

People won't often volunteer information about us until we make it the norm of our relationships that they are expected to do so and

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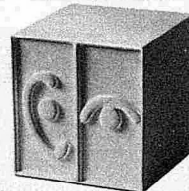
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that they won't get hurt by doing so. What this norm of mutual care and trust is established in a group, this kind of data will flow to me.

3. *I will (can) get more cooperation and commitments from the people who work for me.*

The philosophy is still strong in the business world and in me as a manager that people "really oughta wanta" work hard, do a good job, satisfy the customers and do all those other nifty things that subordinates should do no matter how I may treat them as their boss. There was a time when people had to put up with bad bosses — bosses who didn't care about them as people and who treated them badly, i.e., "I don't care what you think or how you feel — do it!" But people no longer have to suffer such treatment. They have too many opportunities for leaving me and finding better bosses to work for. And if they do stay with me for whatever reasons, they have many ways of punishing me if I behave badly — form a union, reduce production, treat the customers badly, and do the job in a sloppy, uncaring way. But, above all, in today's world, they can quit and go somewhere else. They just don't have to work for me when I treat them so badly.

The option I have is to learn how I'm coming across to them so that I can be more effective, which, in turn, will help make them want to become more effective. The world seems to have a law of reciprocal behavior which I am nothing but stupid if I ignore. In other words, I often get back from others what others feel I give to them. So, the more I can share with them my problems, my goals, and my need for their cooperation, the more cooperation I'm likely to receive from them in turn.

But there is an even greater problem that I face in getting their cooperation, and that is not perceiving, or knowing, or caring about their needs and problems. When people carry around within themselves deep frustrations and uncertainty because of their own unmet needs, then they won't have much interest in helping me meet mine nor the organization meeting its goals.

What can I do?

• I can research what I think is ineffective behavior on my part and get verification or non-verification. One means of doing this is by holding an OD team building meeting.

• I can involve the people who work for me in a broad participative way in the decisions that affect them.

• I can delegate more of the work to them so that they will have meaningful jobs.

• But, more importantly, if I can learn of their own deep personal and individual needs, I will have a chance of meeting them. And when I do find and fulfill their needs — they will be more ready and able to cooperate with me in the achievement of our mutual goals.

4. *I will get more done (have more time).*

This can happen because of a number of possible side effects from our behavior. Some of these are:

• I will know myself better, and, therefore, can separate out and analyze these personal needs that drive me to control, to travel, to check, to do anything that I do — vs. doing the genuine, legitimate needs of the job. (These may be far less demanding of my time and energies than what I tell myself needs doing in the job!) If I can do this, then I will have more time to find and fulfill the most important job needs, as well as self and family needs, and I'll have the time to learn some ways I can fulfill them.

• I will have a chance of being better understood by others so there will be less misunderstandings for me to correct, and my subordinates will make fewer mistakes. How? By being direct in my statements, by guarding against the garbles that occur when I communicate badly, and by having created a climate with my subordinates which enables them to say, "I don't understand" or "I don't agree" when they don't.

• If I can make my expectations more explicit, it also will save time and make me more effective in all of my relationships (a meeting, an interview, a visit, or for a job) for there will be less guesswork and

territory, and my bosses give me my territory!

I also need to learn that I can only win when my boss is my *advocate* and *not* my adversary!

I need to grow to understand, appreciate, and practice the concept of proactive subordinancy vs. defensive subordinancy. Thus, I must take the initiative to cause positive relationships to develop with my boss. I must not leave it always for him to work. If I will nurture the creation of trust through the process of sharing my territory, then I can not only improve my chances of retaining my power, but of increasing it as well. I must ever keep present in my mind that my real power comes from the degree of trust and confidence that I and my bosses have in me. And my willingness to share helps to create that trust!

And OD helps to teach us this ability of trusting and sharing.

7. *I will be more successful (effective).*

If the first six hypotheses are true, or anywhere near the truth, and I follow them, then I shall indeed be more effective in all of my relationships (self-family-boss-subordinate-peer) and will make better decisions and will have more time to do the things that need doing.

But there are three other OD concepts that also fit directly into this category of effectiveness that we can work on. These are:

- It is my behavior — the way *my behavior* impacts my subordinates that turns them on or turns them off, *as well as* my ideas, my attitudes, my beliefs, and my concepts. I basically influence and motivate my people by the way I behave toward them when I'm with them!

- I am responsible for my own behavior. This concept holds that no matter what happens to us "out there" — outside of our own skins — and no matter what happened to us "back when" — in our own near or distant pasts — that our "here

and now" behavior is our own responsibility to control and direct. We can make it what we want it to be. I am not a captive — a puppet on someone's string — but I am a free man who is in charge of me! Thus, when I pout, drop out, shout and holler, act defensively, and behave in any way that is not really suitable for the occasion, I am quite literally "doing it to myself."

- I am responsible also for the results of my own behavior. This means that I do have options to choose from, whether I take advantage of them or not, and that what results *for* me is but what I myself helped to create — caused by me — by my own behavior. I am responsible for the good and the bad that came to me — for it all is the result of my own behavior!

The way OD helps us is to create the trust in our teams that will enable our bosses, peers, and subordinates to mirror for us our behavior so that we will *know* how we are behaving. This gives us data for change.

8. *I will feel better.*

The same argument holds for number eight as I used in number seven. Surely, if we fulfill anywhere near the potential of these seven truths, we will indeed have reason for and the possibility of feeling better. But there are some other OD concepts that will also help to make us feel better in addition to the seven above.

For example, in knowing myself better — my fears, my hangups, my hot buttons, my self-demanding needs, my self-imposed constraints of fear, of control, and of suspicion, etc. — I will be more able to throw off these self-imposed chains and become a free person once again. To the extent that "I do it all to myself," then I am my own worst enemy — my own jailer. Some of the ways this will happen is for me to practice the processes of OD: Confronting when I am upset, asking when I don't understand, participating when I'm with others, making my behavior an effective instrument of my intellect (and not just reacting to my emotions), listening, caring,

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and feeling, I will then be less polluted with self-criticism, self-doubt, self-imposed judgments, and self-guilt. I will have a better self-image.

I can also learn and practice the concept that I also lay all of my own feelings upon myself and thus can't really say "you caused me to feel badly," etc. In coming to feel anything, I am a part of the process that creates the feeling — so can actually cause the feeling *not* to exist (if I really wish).

But most important of all is the possibility that I can know in a positive way where I stand as a person with the people with whom I associate — my bosses, my peers, my subordinates. I am not referring to a neurotic need to be liked, but the more general and basic need we all seem to have to know that others see us, value us, and that our existence makes a difference to them.

Thus, when we get this kind of positive feedback, it does lead to improved self-image, confidence, and enhancement.

If I can do these things and help others do them too, then there will be less opportunity for me to fear and to permit suspicion and distrust to grow and to bloom in my system. I will have the chance of liking me better — of feeling better!

9. I will increase my own potential.

The potential that I have for learning, for changing, for being and becoming, can be sharply limited by my own self-imposed constraints of time, habit, and image. For example, some of the ways I impose these constraints are:

- I already know what I think about race and sex and OD and a world of other things because I've already made up my mind! And since "I know," why should I read, or try, or experience? If I did, I *might* run the risk of having to change.

- I don't have time to read and to question what I'm doing and what I might learn to do. And if I don't, then I won't have any new ideas to challenge me or to grow with.

- I don't have the courage to

question the way I'm doing my job and the new demands that changing conditions may bring about. And if I don't, then I won't chance making mistakes, and I'll be safe.

• I don't have the insight to unlock myself from my own cycle of needs, feelings, and behavior in order to gain new ways, new thoughts, new jobs, new experiences, new meanings, new skills, etc. For aren't my own needs the most important self-guidance system I have to follow? They surely won't lead me astray.

• I don't have the guts to get away from the "shoulds," the "musts," the "ought tos," and the "have tos" that have so long been the guiding motivators of my life.

And by all of these constraints — all self-imposed — I stay hooked to the plow going around and around in the same old 40-acre patch. "I'm locked into myself."

The OD thrust is for me to unlock myself from these and other similar self-imposed constraints and thus release myself to a whole new world of sights, sounds, smells, experience, growth — and risks and rewards, including new in-depth relationships with myself and with others.

And if I do chance this, the chances are that I will indeed start changing!

10. *I will enable people to also grow.*

Perhaps the saddest part of our "normal behavior" is the smothering impact it has upon ourselves and, in turn, upon the people who work for us (and our families).

When I closely control myself, I tend to control the lives of others — their decisions, their philosophy of life, their value systems, their view of right and wrong, their life styles, their judgments, their processes of doing and thinking, as well as their goals, etc. I am indeed forcing them to accept being as narrow as I am and to be dependent upon me, or to reject me! In this kind of control, I not only have gradually taken away my own freedom, my own initiative, and my own security, but have done the same for the people who depend upon me as well.

One way I have of doing this, of

course, is to make my own views as a boss in all these areas so hard, so certain, so uncompromising, so black-and-white, so dogmatic, so important to the way I view right and wrong, that there is no room for my subordinates to be "good guys" and be different from me. They have only a choice of either/or! And the organization that has this pattern as its management behavior norm is rigidly, rightly, and completely centralized, no matter what its policies state and its management proclaims.

Through the process of OD, we have a chance of seeing our behavior, evaluating our behavior, and of changing our behavior so that we can unhook ourselves from creating dependency at all levels below us. This will create the situation and the climate that will enable people to take responsibility for their own lives, values, outlooks and decisions, and to show initiative at all levels within the organization. People will grow! This creates the opportunity for everyone to win!

Conclusion

Can I prove to you that all of this is true? No, of course not, for if you are doubtful and skeptical, then all the words in the world won't change your skepticism and doubt — you might reread number nine. All I can really say is that it is true in my own experience, and I find it a never-ending quest.

If you still have the stars in your eyes to want a better state for yourself and others, and the courage to take a little bit of chance with the unknown, and just enough belief to make it sound a little bit plausible, then a whole new world of becoming awaits you. It's yours and mine for the trying! — *Bill Crockett*

William J. Crockett is a Fellow of the NTL Institute and has worked as a laboratory trainer for UCLA, the U.S. Civil Service Commission, TRW Systems and Yale University. He is a member of The International Association of Applied Social Sciences, Inc., the Personnel Round Table, The American Society of Personnel Administrators, Academy of Management and ASTD.

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