



TALKING

TEN MANAGERS ON
PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

A topic edition by RANDSTAD-MTC Mediation-Training-Coaching voor MKB-bedrijven

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A small booklet

In this booklet we are happy to share ten thought-provoking statements with you from managers in different business branches. We interviewed them on the subject of people management. Based on their daily practice, they told us what works for them.

We are grateful that they were willing to share their visions. We compiled them in this booklet and elaborated briefly on them from the interviews. Proper communication at the workplace noticeably appears to be a common element.

Find out what appeals to you and let yourself be inspired from practical viewpoints.

Familiar ground for you? Maybe it will incite further thinking about what you already know or do. Or you may feel like inspiring other people from what you read. Please do so! Speak about it and feel free to forward this booklet to others. *

Would you like to share recommendations or tips from your own practical experiences? Please let us know!

Mail us at info@randstad-mtc.nl, use the contact form on our website www.randstad-mtc.nl or give us a call at +31 - 70 - 800 2356.



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Financial executive in the passenger transportation sector:

“If you give trust, it will be reciprocated”

One of the most important things for a manager is to have support. You must manage to create acceptance as a basis for reaching your goals. This can't be done without trust.

If you give trust, it will be reciprocated. That's the way it works. If I show resistance in certain situations, people will still listen to me because there is trust.

Also, you must listen well yourself. Be well informed about the things you are responsible for. That way you can better assess the opinions of others and give appropriate feedback. Good listening is a basic element of good communication.

In the long run, it's always about the content. Procedures are secondary. As a specialist in your field, you need to be able to communicate well on the substance of matters. You may be firm on the content, as long as you be mild with the individual. It's all about people.

You should have an eye for what people see as important. For instance: appreciation, opportunity to develop, space and trust for taking on responsibilities. These are things that commit people to your company.





Owner/manager in hospitality branch:

“If you’re too eager to see something in somebody, then you will. Better is to look at someone’s talents.”

‘Manager’ is not merely an occupation, but a profession that you need to have talent for. That’s where it all starts.

You use that talent to see, to appreciate, and to nurture other people’s talents. Don’t look at what you want to see but look at what’s there and develop it. In that way you can optimally match what people have to offer to what your business needs.

The trick is to apply your talent in such a way as to inspire others to want and to be able to do their job well. This is also about respect. Respect comes by inspiring and offering the necessary tools to your employees and by truly communicating with them.

Communication is a skill. It takes talent, but people can also learn to communicate better. You have to offer your people that opportunity because you are not alone when you communicate. Also, people are constantly in communication with one another on the job. You want that to go effectively as well, otherwise your company won’t run well.

Just as well, grab the same opportunity for yourself if it’s necessary. I know managers still having a lot to learn when it comes to communicating. No problem, but do it. Develop your talents and those of others. If you don’t learn, you will stand still.

Communicating needs to be done in a way that appeals to people. That too takes inherent talent. Above all, each employee essentially stands for an individual wanting to be seen as they are. As a manager you need to be aware of that and approach your people accordingly, while staying true to yourself as a person as well. That way the energy will flow mutually and will be sustainable.



VALUE

Staff member in the transportation branch:

“I periodically ask each of my workers: Why are you where you are?”

This question fits in with the concept of *servant leadership*¹. Object of the question is to make people in the company think regularly about how they appreciate their present position. It's about value; the value they set for themselves.

Servant leadership focuses on allowing people to realize their own value. We apply it on all levels in the company. Ultimately it is directed at results, where the client is key. Fundamentally, you want to surpass the client's expectations.

“Feel important. Look at your contribution within the company.” We think it's essential that people evaluate that themselves. That's much better than constantly patting them on the shoulder.

When you ask people why they are where they are in the company, usually they will have to give the question some thought. If there are any issues, those will usually only be revealed after deeper questioning. So that's what you should do.

It's important to know what someone needs. You want to create an atmosphere enabling people to grow and develop. At the same time, you need to be clear about their prospects within the company.

Evaluation talks are basically there to give attention. That is their main value. That attention should be forthright. Of course you can also receive criticism. Be glad if that happens: people will not be frank and honest with someone they don't think is worth it.



¹ See e.g. the Dutch book by Henk Jan Kamsteeg “Dienend Leiderschap”, available at (among others) managementboek.nl: <https://www.managementboek.nl/boek/9789047008439/dienend-leiderschap-henk-jan-kamsteeg>



AUTHORITY

CEO in the services sector:

“If you pursue authority deliberately, you will be apt to get the opposite.”

I would be lying if I would say that an executive doesn't need to have authority. Let's just say: it helps. Having a certain amount of authority is good, but if you pursue it deliberately you will easily get the opposite.

Authority comes in different varieties. People can grant it warm-heartedly if it's earned by truly fulfilling their expectations. This is *acquired authority*. For instance, by being the person you are, by the way you get along with people and by being an expert in what you're doing, or by something else.

Then there are managers that have authority without it being granted to them warm-heartedly. For example, by being authentic and doing things people appreciate or admire, even when these are inconvenient things. In that situation, we're still talking about acquired authority. Acquired authority works.

There is also something called *attributed authority*. This is authority ascribed solely on the basis of position or formal competences. Authority on paper, as it were. If you only attained it that way, you might not be in the right place. That sounds harsh and so it is.

If you are struggling with authority, then try another approach. There are many ways within close reach. Do you talk with people? Do you really listen? Do you invite them to say what's really on their mind? Do you know what they actually need? Are you dealing with that sufficiently? Do you dare to ask for feedback about yourself?

You can ask yourself hundreds of questions and you should. Get the right answers to them and put two or three of those into practice. Often small changes bring considerable results. I'd always go for that opportunity.



SELF-RELIANCE

Manager in the non-profit sector:

“Any company must be self-reliant during tensions and conflicts.”

In your management position you are responsible for the people and the organisation. If people or the organisation (or both) change, then the balance may also change.

It's important that the person and the assignment are in balance. Together with your people, draw up the balance each year on how they evaluate their own work situation. Not casually or amid other things but in a real dialogue on the subject. What are the mutual expectations? Do things still fit? If not, it's time to create a new balance.

Besides an employment contract, employer and employee also have a psychological contract: 'You get on the wagon and join in'. Don't let things simmer if someone seems not to be participating at a certain moment. Addressing the subject with them is a matter of good manners too. You have to be gutsy and have the decency to speak up straight away. This applies to both parties.

If someone is protesting, look at their personal history and talk about it. With which purpose and what expectations did someone start in the company? How has it developed? What factors and circumstances have changed since then? What's the real source of the tensions coming up and what can you do about it?

Preventing and resolving tensions should be given much more priority within the organisation. Every company should be self-reliant as much as possible and able to resolve its own frictions and conflicts.

It starts with prevention. Prevention is about how people treat one another at work, how they get along, and how they communicate with each other on the work floor. It's important to recognize and acknowledge possible friction and conflict risks before they escalate. You can improve people's skills in this area by providing them with relevant training.

People often conflict with one another on subject matters when in fact the problem is really about something else. Teach them to recognize and acknowledge what it is actually really about and how best to deal with that.



COMMUNICATING

Professional in the healthcare branch:

“Good communication means: I see you.”

Good communication means: *I see you*. Not ‘seeing’ the other person will often be taken for mere arrogance. It may appear so, but in 80% of the cases arrogance points towards insecurity. The other 20% are indeed arrogant. It doesn’t matter which category someone is in, there is always something to be gained by improving communication.

As a manager you must initiate talks with the people working for you. No ‘broadcasting’ or debating but sincere communication. You must be aware of your own style and non-verbal communication. Make sure you don’t corner someone but offer them openings and space. Ask yourself: if you would be me, how would you do it? And how would I do it in your position?

A labour dispute can emerge when people do not ‘see’ each other. Then there is something lacking in the communication. When people are pointing at others, they are taking on the role of a victim: ‘Someone else should solve the problem!’. Meanwhile, no one is waiting for someone to call in sick. Everybody should ask themselves: can I do something here about this?

Make people aware that he or she can contribute to a solution. Not as blame but as an opportunity. Offer space and show what you can do yourself. You can achieve that only by communicating.

We had a case where people really didn’t ‘see’ each other anymore. Communication had ceased. An advisor spoke with each of them individually. Conclusion: labour dispute. The case was referred to a mediator and in that way resolved.



EXPECTATIONS

HR-professional in the recruitment branch:

“Speak openly about your expectations and be concrete on issues.”

Communication is not easy for everyone. Lack of clarity causes friction. It’s also about expectations.

Do you expect, for instance, someone to be flexible? Do not leave it to just an expectation but bring it to the table. Easily said, but this happens all too little.

Expectations are one-sided if you don’t share them with the person you expect something from. By not sharing, you will find yourself disappointed, and probably the other person will too.

If you expect something from someone, it’s much easier if that person clearly knows what your expectation entails. So make your expectation concrete. In the above example: be clear about what you mean by ‘being flexible’ so that the other person can act on it. Also, give recognition when they perform appropriately. That way you connect.

If something does go wrong in our business, we are very direct and open about it. Firm but involved, and always with respect because you wish the best for each other. My team is quite extravert so when there are frustrations, we go for direct communication. Sometimes that may feel harsh but it creates clarity.

This goes two ways, not only bottom down. It is just as important that employees speak up clearly to their managers. As a manager you should encourage that and allow space for it. The benefits will be significant.



ASKING

Owner legal services offices:

“There are no tensions between us because we always say what we think.”

There are no tensions on our company’s work floor because we always say what’s on our mind; always with respect for one another.

Concisely put: respectful communication. Two words for something you should be very clear on in every day practice. Everyone can do it, as long as they want to. It can only be done by listening and asking questions.

If someone doesn’t communicate as well as you do, that might seem ‘convenient’ for yourself, like in a situation when you are trying to push for something. In the long run though, it doesn’t work that way. It’s better to help the other to communicate better. That way you will hear more and the other will feel heard.

How to do that? By showing respect and trust along with asking the right questions sincerely and with real interest. Ask questions that give the other person the space he or she needs to bring their message across to you. People sense that and they will respond accordingly.

You will likely get to hear things that would have otherwise remained hidden from you. If people do not feel they can openly speak with you, issues are apt to fester.

That’s why I ask questions and why I give people the space to say what they really think. Asking questions for me is a golden tool.



INDICATING

Manager association of professionals

“If you don’t dare to point something out, you will have a conflict within a year.”

As a manager, you can normally recognize a situation when an employee can’t deal with his or her work or a situation at work. This circumstance can lead to absence, failure or illness. The sooner you notice the problem, the easier it will be to do something about it. Prevention is better than healing.

That sounds obvious but the reality can be very different. You can shut your eyes for something that happens for different reasons. Maybe you want to be careful and not point a finger too soon. Some people may be shy or a little afraid to bring something up.

At times that may be the case when there are negative factors associated to the employee in question. It’s not that the work is too much or unsuitable, but that the person is sort of cheating or ostentatiously acting in a non-collegial fashion. If you don’t confront and indicate the problem, it will escalate into a full blown conflict in a year or less.

In a situation wherein everyone fully understands the mission, each employee has a certain responsibility. That is commitment. You will judge on output and results to determine the balance. However, you have to differentiate your approach because not everyone appreciates having ample freedom and responsibility. One employee simply wants and also may need more guidance than another. So there is not just one method here; it also depends on one’s character and needs. If you do not have an eye for that, you are doing something wrong.

Sometimes you feel disappointed with someone because something is genuinely not right. Still, I always take trust as a basic rule. Yes, I have bumped my head occasionally. When you really have to, you must take action. I had to intervene severely once. I did so in a private conversation -of course confidentially- identifying the problem head on. The relationship was perfectly fine afterwards and it has remained that way ever since.



TALKING

Director-owner in the communication branch:

“Always keep talking. The capital is in the people.”

Of course such a statement is not very surprising from someone working in this branch. But the branch, in fact, doesn't matter at all. It applies everywhere. Keep communicating, always keep talking. You can buy technology, but the real asset is in people.

I find it important to be open with my employees in both good and bad times. Every now and then I share with them how the company is doing. We talk about it. You need to take them away from their workplace for such a conversation, otherwise it won't work.

It's only natural that there will be problems among colleagues at times. We always talk as long as needed to solve them. To make progress, you must not fill in each other's thoughts. You must not think for the other. That's why it is important for people to be able to communicate well together.

We work hard, including at our job meetings. Not everyone is brave enough to say everything in the group. That's why I regularly arrange 1 on 1 meetings as well. People feel that they are being taken seriously when they are invited for a personal meeting, where there is genuine mutual communication.

I am a sensitive person. If I am sad about a situation at work, I let it show. It's appreciated. If you are sincere you will be rewarded with sincerity. If you play a role, you will get role playing in return.

My goal is to keep people with the company as long as possible. If circumstances require a dismissal, I take that as a personal defeat. It may happen that you are put into that position for economic reasons. Then you'll have to. In such moments you are glad that you've always been open and upfront with your employees. They will reward you with their personal goodwill.





Soft skills. Solid solutions.

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Published by **RANDSTAD-MTC** Mediation - Training - Coaching voor MKB-bedrijven

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