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Hut, Hut ... Hut by Bob Manna & Matt Manna • 79DD1EE9(R04)

"Success requires more than doing things right. Success requires knowing the right things to do; a talent that literally comes from the ground up."

A major flaw of many organizations is that they operate within a single communication structure. At the top are the C people: Chief This, Chief That, etc. Middle management appears (as the term suggests) in the middle, and the foot soldiers are at the bottom. This structure is known as a hierarchy and is commonly represented by the boxes and lines of an organization chart.

Hierarchies are appropriate when information must flow from the top of an organization to the bottom. Their flaw is that hierarchies are one way streets that keep information from flowing in other directions. Let's take a look...

A good example of a hierarchy is a football team playing a game. During the game a play is sent from the "C" people (the coaches) to the quarterback. The quarterback fulfills the role of middle management by relaying the play to his teammates (the foot soldiers), each of whom has a specific assignment. If the players do what they are told, the right way, something desirable happens.

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But it takes more to win than doing things right. Consider that there are 2800 players in the NFL during pre-season. These players are the best in the world at what they do. Even so, by the time the season starts the number of NFL players is reduced to 1700. Everybody who plays in a regular season NFL game can do things right.

What separates the winners from losers is knowing the right things to do. That's why the C-people (the coaches) set hierarchal structure aside during the week(s) before a game.

Before a game coaches seek information from players who once played for the opponent. Statistical scouting reports are picked-over in hopes of revealing traits and trends. Film is reviewed. Weather conditions are monitored, etc. Coaches must create winning game plans to be successful, and that means having a way to communicate with as many credible sources as possible.

Of necessity a plan (for a game or anything else) must be rigidly defined and clearly articulated. But plan creation is different. Plan creation requires flexibility and openness to react to the competition. When an organization is creating a plan, the top to bottom one way nature of a hierarchy is inappropriate because hierarchal structures are rigid, and by definition, rigid structures can't react.

Plan creation demands a framework that stimulates the free flow of information, regardless of hierarchical structure. There is such a framework. We call it Broadcasting — the communications framework that assures information at any level, from any source both within and outside an organization, can flow directly to where it is most needed.

We have many personal business experiences working with Broadcasting. We chose the following because the brand is exceptionally well known, enjoys a wide market segment reach, and clearly exemplifies Broadcasting.

For years the Scott's company was mired in third-place behind Dow Chemical and Sears Roebuck in the sale of seed and fertilizer to commercial farmers. Scott's remained in third-place regardless of their many attempts to promote the product.

Scott's product was good. In fact Scott's offered a 99.91% weed free seed. However it cost more than the competition and Scott's was having difficulty convincing farmers that fewer weeds was worth the high price. Scott's leadership questioned, "Can we lower the price?" They asked, "How do we make the product better?" Those questions didn't solve the problem.

The facts are a little sketchy, but supposedly a Scott's sales rep was made aware of what led to Scott's ascent by a farmer who had recently returned from his fields. The rep, who had repeatedly failed to sell what was a demonstrably superior product, turned to the farmer and out of frustration asked, "What is it about our product you don't like?"

The farmer replied, "It's not the product. My problem is I need a better way to spread seed and fertilizer." At that moment the rep realized that getting the sale was about product application, not product performance. After all, the product was already known to perform better than the competition.

The rep realized he had to interrupt Scott's hierarchy and convince Scott's leadership to seek a solution to the application problem. Scott's rep had to be allowed to influence the decision making process. And thankfully for Scott's, he was!

Scott's purchased and promulgated the use of commercial seed and fertilizer spreaders. That single action redefined Scott's in their customer's minds. As a result, Scott's became the spreader company that sells superior seed and fertilizer, not just another seed and fertilizer company.

Agricultural operations have spreading needs other than seed and fertilizer, so when the question of spreading anything arose, Scott's got the call. Today Scott's is a leading producer and marketer of not only seeds and fertilizers, but also herbicides and pesticides.

Scott's subsequently introduced the first home lawn spreader. After all, every homeowner shares the same need as farmers – to spread seed and fertilizer. Today, with its Turf Builder and other high quality brands, Scott's owns just over half of the do-it-yourself lawn care market.

Here are some of Broadcasting's tenets as illustrated by the Scott's story.

Never present a problem as a question. Present a problem(s) as a situation to be changed. When Scott's leadership asked — "How do we make the product better?" — they unwittingly directed their focus on the product, and the product wasn't the problem. The danger in asking a question is it presumes the question is correct. When the question is not correct, you get an answer, but you don't solve the problem. Lower cost and better product were not the farmer's problems.

Knowledge has the right to judgment. The quality of any decision is enhanced when those with the most pertinent knowledge about the subject being decided participate in the decision making process. Broadcasting ensured that the Scott's rep got to sit at the decision making table.

The person with the problem has the freedom to communicate directly with the person with the answer. Departmental boundaries don't exist in a Broadcasting environment because it is impossible to know where individuals with the most pertinent knowledge exist. Indeed those individuals may only exist outside of the organization. Scott's solution came from a farmer in a field, not from within Scott's.

The role of a leader is not to make decisions, but to monitor the decision making process. Within a Broadcasting environment a leader isn't a player, he or she is a referee tasked with ensuring that the person(s) with the greatest insight of the subject at hand has access to the person(s) with the problem. The revelation that Scott's would sell seed not by making the seed cheaper or better, but by making the application easier, literally came from the ground up. A farmer in a field, told a Scott's rep, who told Scott's leadership. That's the power of Broadcasting!

It's clear that luck sometimes plays a role in success. But luck can't be planned. It's also clear that success requires the talent to do things right. But success requires a measure of talent beyond an ability to do things right. Success requires the talent to discover the right thing(s) to do. Successful companies possess this talent in great measure and make the ultimate case for Broadcasting.



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