

Strategy: First-line Supervisors

There are some apparently difficult questions that, amazingly enough, actually do have pretty straightforward answers. Here's one of them: What is the number one cause of employee dissatisfaction? And the answer? Crystal clear, research shows it, maybe your common sense does as well: It is the quality of the first-line supervisor.

The simply reality is, you can be in a company of thieves and if you have a great first-line supervisor you're a happy camper, or you can be in a company of the gods and have a crappy first-line supervisor and you're a miserable human being. Now, what's the translation of this? There are many. But what it says is that arguably the most significant—one of the most significant—strategic decisions that a company makes is the promotion to first-line supervisor.

Now, let me be clear. I'm not calling you an idiot. I'm sure you worry about it if you're in a position to do so. I'm not talking about worrying about it. I'm saying that this may be one of the top 10 strategic variables in the effectiveness of the company. If employees are happy, they'll serve their customers well, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So, I'm not asking you to take it seriously. I'm asking you to take it very, very, very, *very* seriously, and never, *ever* promote somebody who isn't qualified to be a first-line supervisor to that job just because you "need to fill a slot."

Second half of that story, let's assume you have made such good decisions. Do you have—answer me, answer me honestly—do you have one of the best first-line supervisor training programs in your industry, in your region, in the world? Or what have you? Most companies have slap-dash first-line supervisor training. Some of them don't have any first-line supervisor training. But treat this little class of human beings—your first-line supervisors—as the gods of employee satisfaction and, thence, customer satisfaction and retention. There are very few things that are more important. I know you care about it. I'm asking you to be obsessive.