

READING YOUR MANAGEMENT

Denise P. Kalm, DPK Coaching

How accurately can you gauge management sentiment? Do you grasp the culture and politics well enough to know where you and your team/department/organization stand? None of us has a true crystal ball to help us predict the future, but past and present behavior and decisions can guide us to understanding what the future may hold. Gaining better awareness will help you to weather layoffs and reorganizations with aplomb, put you front and center when raises and promotions are awarded, and give you a feeling of control over your circumstances.

The first point to appreciate is that you really do need to know what your boss and his/her boss are thinking. Then, you must understand how your company makes money and whether or not your division or area is contributing to corporate success. At every point, you are being assessed on how you contribute value to the company, so you have to know what “value” means.

Could you be surprised to find that what you do is not valuable? Are you involved in the decisions made for your area? Does your work contribute to the company’s bottom line? Let’s look at how you make yourself into a savvier individual, so that you can anticipate and manage corporate changes.

CORPORATE KNOWLEDGE

Keep on top of the following to understand the business of your company.

- Learn how your company makes money – this includes understanding the cost of making that money – there are no free lunches in the corporate world. Revenue has to exceed the cost of producing it or there is no profit.

- Understand how the company's leaders see its mission. This is only partly what they produce for profit. Southwest Airlines lives and breathes its mission and if you work for them, you must too. Friendly customer service is the core.

"The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of Customer Service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and Company Spirit".

- Follow the stock price. Learn about the seasonality of the business and how its success compares to peers and competitors.
- Listen to all corporate earnings calls and learn how to read the balance sheet. Keep a close watch on which areas of the business are profitable and which ones are doing poorly.
- Understand every corporate announcement issued, especially reorganizations and mergers/acquisitions.
- Learn how your area contributes to corporate earnings and corporate costs. Are you part of the solution or part of the problem?

MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE

- Get clear on the chain of command. How close are you to the top of your company? How many of the people above you are people who know your name? Your accomplishments?
- Learn about the leaders. Read their bios, which are almost always publicly available. You can learn a lot about where a person wants to go from where they have been. Read their LinkedIn profile, if you can.
- How is information about the value of your group communicated to management? How many levels up does it go?

- Besides your direct reporting line, do you know your internal or external customers?
Those who do not work directly with the outside world have internal customers they serve. Do you know them? Do they know what you do for them? Are you doing the right things?
- How does communication work at your company? Does your manager share things with you as soon as he/she learns them? Is there an opportunity for input from the individual contributor level?
- Is there an Idea Box and do you contribute to it? If not, do you share best practices across the company? Leaders lead with great ideas that they are willing to share. Hoarders, focused on their narrow expertise, often find themselves replaced.
- Schedule regular 1x1's with your manager and occasional ones with his/her boss. Keep them short and focused, contributing what you have done lately that adds value. Then, turn it around and ask them what other work you could be doing that might be even more valuable. Keep the topic focused on value and you will be remembered.
- Participate in company events and when it makes sense, ask questions and seek to gain not just information, but the "pulse" of the speaker.
- Find a way to share information you have gathered with others at the company. Ask for input. Exploit the web as a way to communicate.
- Learn and embrace the culture of the company. If people share information on an internal website, be one of the first to post your information and picture.
- When changes are announced, see the opportunity first, not the challenge. Be the cheerleader and watch for opportunities to make a positive impact.

Be the answer, not the problem. As you move up into management, your attitude and approach will guide others. As you learn what works at your company and what management values the

most, you can communicate the value of what you do in a way that it can be clearly understood.

When you are seen as a key member of the team, you will get a jump on tomorrow's news and

be more likely to take advantage of the opportunities that emerge.