



# It's My Way or the Highway...Or Is It?

One more time, before launching into the next installment of this series of employee performance articles, I just wanted to take a moment to thank those of you who have been so kind in your comments and so open in sharing your personal experiences with me. Whether you realize it or not, your input really goes a long way to both encourage me to keep writing this column and in providing me with good solid topics that are focused on the real challenges we all face. Your feedback actually makes this column better and helps your fellow members of our industry. Whether you are a shop owner, manager, office staff, or technician, your feedback is welcome and beneficial to everyone. So keep your comments, questions, and ideas coming!

If you haven't already done so, you should read last month's article in order to get more from this month's article. In fact, why not re-read last month's article now, just to refresh your memory.

Last month we covered what to do when you show an employee how to do something in a fashion that is new or different and that employee thinks your way is flawed and will not work. This month's topic is similar, but the employee's focus is different. The focus in this instance is on their way being better...not on your way being flawed or not working. In other words, your way works, but they think theirs works better. For example:

- You show a technician a new technique that will increase net productivity by reducing the number of defective units, but he thinks his way is faster and yielding even more productivity.

- You tell your service writer that he or she must close every sale by actually asking the customer to buy. The service writer thinks his method is less confrontational and will make the customer more at ease so he will actually sell more.
- You emphasize that accurate notes on all paperwork will make everyone's job easier and protect the shop and customer from costly oversights. The employees think they catch everything and save time by just telling the manager what they think he needs to know.

Notice how in each of these situations, which are very similar to last month's situations, the problem isn't that the employees think there is something wrong with your way, they just think their way is better so they continue to do it their way. These situations are frequently interpreted as resistance to change, but they're not. Employees are using logical thinking from their point of view and if they think their way will work better than yours, why in the world would they do it your way?

Caution: We're not talking about a situation where their way is actually better than yours. If this were the case, it should be done their way. We're talking here about situations in which employees have misinformation about how successful their methods are in comparison to yours.

It's not uncommon to hear two shop owners from within the same industry describe problem employees in the following manner:

**Shop Owner #1** - *"Why can't employees think for themselves, instead of always having to be told every-*

*thing to do? Why can't they think things through on their own and be innovative?"*

**Shop Owner #2** - *"Why don't employees do things the way they are told to do them? Why can't they just simply follow directions?"*

I might suggest that these two shop owners simply trade employees, but this isn't the solution, and in fact, the employees are not the problem.

The fact is that most managers are all better off with and prefer employees that are thinking, innovative and are committed to continuous improvement. Managers often don't realize that employees who don't follow instructions may actually be thinking for themselves...they are being innovative. They are often doing what they think is better for the company.

Most managers are okay with innovative employees as long as things go well, but when it fails the manager's fall back position is, "Why can't they follow instructions?"

When employees choose the alternative of doing things differently than the directive you gave, they are being innovative, but are still doing the wrong things. "There is no right way to do a wrong thing." This is an example of bad innovation. Bad innovation causes problems for you, your employees, and the company.

As a manager, you cannot permit non-compliance to continue even when it works. This presents an inconsistent message to the employees, which says "You can do as you wish as long as you get results and I don't catch you." All non-compliance, experimentation, and innovation needs to be discussed,

tested, approved and done with purpose and direction. By doing this, you are encouraging innovation while maintaining a compliant work force.

### Here are some simple steps to help prevent this situation in your business:

- Separate good innovation from bad innovation and deal consistently with both by establishing a process for submitting new ideas.
- Be open to innovation, but set the ground rules for experimenting and implementing.
- Make new ideas and methods an agenda item for every team meeting, but don't limit this to just meetings...most new ideas occur during the heat of the battle.
- Encourage employees to openly discuss their ideas for improvement and to seek approval before experimenting.
- When approval is granted, be sure to include some methodology for measuring results so you can objectively compare the new way against the established way.
- Check with the worker before he

begins to work with a new method. Find out how he feels about it and if he has any problems with doing it your way. Ask, "Can you think of any reason why you might do this job differently than we have discussed?" You must uncover and deal with any reason before work begins to prevent poor performance.

- When push comes to shove, as the manager, you must convincingly present information that supports that your way will work and work better than theirs. Telling is simply not enough; you must present proof that demonstrates the results. In other words, share the comparative results, so they can see that your way is better.
- Don't make the mistake of letting someone do something wrong just to prove that you are right. Giving employees enough rope to hang themselves is cruel, costly, and can be embarrassing. It is better to insist on compliance.
- If all else fails, ask, "Is there anything I can do to convince you that your way is not better than my

way?" If the answer is "No," **flatly state that the discussion is over and it must be done your way.**

Remember last month's article; if you are going to impose your methods or ideas on the employee, you must be willing to accept responsibility for the results. If the results are bad, it's your problem and if the results are good, give credit to the employee. This is a true sign of a good leader.

*In the meantime, keep in mind that much of the success of this series of articles depends on you. I encourage you to help by sharing your own challenges and personal stories about employee nonperformance issues. Share stories from your own perspective - whether you're an employee or an owner or a manager. Don't worry about form or format; just send in your thoughts, ideas, concerns and challenges in your own words. You can send them by mail, email or FAX. Anonymous contributions are welcome, and if you want to keep it confidential, I'll honor that, too. I'll compile them and turn them into articles that are sure to be learning experiences for everybody.*

*Mail your contributions to Thom Tschetter c/o ATRA, 2400 Lafigo Avenue, Oxnard, CA 93030. My toll free phone is 888-274-3776 extension 830; my email is: thom@profitboost.com or send a FAX to 888-274-3787. If you use email or send a FAX, please include the words "Employee Performance Article" in the subject line. Also, feel free to send any questions or challenges you encounter in implementing any of the ideas discussed in this series. I look forward to hearing from you.*





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