THE LITTLE BOOK OF

BIG

MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS

The 76 most important questions and how to answer them

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THE LITTLE BOOK OF BIG MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS

QUESTION 19 # HOW CAN I USE STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE?

Why it's important: Every manager has a responsibility to develop their staff and themselves.

It is often said that an organisation's greatest asset is its staff. It's more accurate to say that potentially staff are an organisation's greatest asset. Too many organisations fail to train and develop their staff adequately. It's well known that in tough times the first two budgets to be cut are advertising and training.

You may believe that you already have a well-trained staff. But I'll bet that if they are using a computer system or complex machinery they are only using about 20 per cent of its capabilities to do their job. Why am I so sure? Because adults learn what they need to know and disregard what they think is superfluous. Once your staff became competent at their job, they stopped asking what else the system could do for them. Effectively they are wasting 80 per cent of the system's capabilities. Reduce that wastage and productivity will be increased.

WHAT TO DO

- It's common to find that managers are reluctant to go on training courses with their staff. Possibly this is because they don't want to be upstaged by a junior member of staff. If you want your staff to engage fully in training, you need to demonstrate your commitment to it and act as a role model. Besides, attending a training event with your staff is a great way to get to know them and to identify talent.

- Undertake a training needs analysis for each member of staff. Start by recording what level of skills the person currently has and compare this to the skills and knowledge that they require to perform their job to an excellent standard. The difference between the two is the skills and knowledge gap they need to close.

- In conjunction with the person, develop a training plan to close the gap. This may be no more than sitting with a more experienced member of staff or following an in-house training programme. But it may also mean going for more training from the company who supplied the system or machine they work with.

- Before the person attends any training course, agree a set of assessment outcomes that you expect them to achieve.

- Ensure that every task your team has to perform can be done by at least two people.

- If you followed the advice in Question 16 you will have employed ambitious and enthusiastic staff who are interested in a career. Don't stifle their ambition. Work with them to identify their aims and ambitions, and develop a plan for how they can reach their goals. This may involve gaining further trade or professional qualifications, or improving their supervisory, management, presentational, technical, strategic or analytical skills.

- You may not be able to support your staff financially or with time off to pursue their training, but you can be sympathetic to their request to leave 30 minutes early on their college night or for time off for revision and exams. If they do pass, congratulate them publicly.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- When did I last attend a training and development session?

- Do I actively promote training for staff, or do I see their attendance on a course in terms of lost productivity?
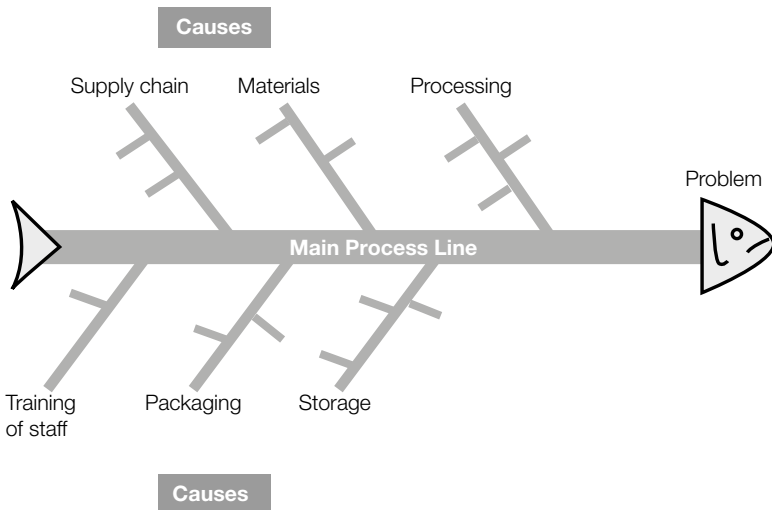
QUESTION 20   HOW CAN I STAMP OUT RECURRING PROBLEMS?

Why it's important: Recurring problems cost time and money. Eliminate them at source and you save on both.

There are one-off problems and there are recurring problems. One-off problems are by their nature unique and are usually caused by an individual mistake or a combination of rare events. As long as there are people, you're going to have one-off problems/mistakes. However, the quality guru Kaoru Ishikawa outlined a way to identify the cause/s of recurring problems, which is applicable to organisations in both the manufacturing and service sectors.

Ishikawa's approach involves drawing a skeleton of a fish. The head of the fish is used to record the problem. The backbone is the main process that is under review. From the backbone hang the fish's smaller bones. These are the sub-processes that contribute to the main process you are investigating. To identify the fault/s that is causing the problem, it's necessary to examine each of these sub-processes (smaller bones) as the cause/s could lie anywhere and/or be caused by a combination of problems in several sub-processes.

Causes

Supply chain   Materials   Processing

Problem

Main Process Line

Training of staff   Packaging   Storage

Causes

Source: Adapted from K. Ishikawa, *Guide to Quality Control*, 2nd edn, Asian Productivity Organization, 1968.

Obviously it's not necessary to draw a fish map – you could just as easily use a mind map or network chart to identify all the processes that you need to explore. Choose whichever approach you are most comfortable with.

WHAT TO DO

- Define your problem precisely and write it at the top of the page in or near the fish's head. For example, if customers are complaining about scratched products, is the problem caused by the actions of the carriers, is the packaging at fault, or are the materials used too susceptible to scratching?

- Analyse the causes of the problem using a small team to brainstorm the problem.

- Don't take action until you're sure you have identified the real problem and the sub-issues that make it up. You don't want to solve the problem you think exists – you want to eliminate the real thing.

- Remember, very often problems occur where two or more systems interface.

- Explore each 'bone' in turn, and exhaust your search of that bone before you move on to the next.

- As you identify each sub-problem, test and confirm that it actually contributes to the recurring problem.

- Log all problems that you identify, but put to one side those that don't contribute to the problem you are trying to fix. You can return to them later.

- Obtain the support of those you need to eliminate the problem (*see Question 45*). Don't antagonise people by blaming them for the problem. Instead, present the facts in neutral terms and show how a successful resolution can create a win/win situation for all parties (*see Question 23*).

- Identify a set of performance standards you can use to judge how effective your actions have been; for example, success = a reduction in customer complaints of 50 per cent (*see Question 29*).

- Don't claim all the credit for any improvement achieved – spread it around. That way colleagues and staff will be willing to help when you approach them for help next time.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- What are the three worst recurring problems I currently face? What am I going to do about them?

- Who can help me identify all the potential causes of the problem?

HOW CAN I MOTIVATE STAFF?

Why it's important: Managers achieve results through their staff. A well-motivated staff deliver better and more consistent results than a demotivated team.

There are dozens if not hundreds of motivational theories to choose from. But before you can apply any of them there is one thing you need to do – you need to get to know your staff. Your staff are a collection of individuals and an approach that motivates one person may have no effect on another. That's why you need to know what makes each person tick. What are their likes, dislikes and interests? What do they value: is it money, status, or to be seen to have influence with you? The more you know about your team, the more effective your efforts at motivation will be.

Once you know your staff you can turn to motivation theories for further insights. Of all the theories around, I think that Frederick Herzberg's motivation and hygiene theory is the most practical to use. He identified genuine motivational factors and hygiene factors. Hygiene factors don't motivate staff, no matter how good they are, but they will demotivate staff if they fall below an acceptable level.

Factors that motivate staff	*Hygiene factors that demotivate staff*
Interesting, worthwhile work that challenges the individual	The working environment and staff facilities, when they fall below expected standards
Work that has meaning and value to the individual	Pay and job security, when they fall below peoples' expectations
A degree of responsibility and the autonomy to arrange and do the work in a way they choose	The organisation's rules, policies and procedures, when these obstruct work rather than assist performance
Recognition of good work and the possibility of advancement; this may involve promotion or being trusted with more complex work	Poor relations between staff and supervisors/managers

WHAT TO DO

- You can't motivate those who don't give a damn. So recruit committed, enthusiastic and self-motivated individuals who take a pride in themselves and their work (*see Question 16*).
- Use casual conversations, one-to-one meetings, team and performance review meetings, away days and social events to get to know your staff as people.
- Constantly monitor the hygiene factors and ensure that none of them falls below acceptable levels. What is acceptable will vary from organisation to organisation.
- Examine how work is distributed among staff. Is one person doing all the grunt tasks? If so, redistribute some of their work to others and give them a few interesting and challenging tasks to compensate for all the dross they still have to handle.
- Explain to staff how their work fits into the overall work flow and why it's important.
- Negotiate and set individual targets for each member of staff and allow staff a degree of autonomy in how they go about their work. Set a mixture of easy and challenging targets, as successful completion of the easier targets will motivate the person to tackle the harder targets.
- Whenever possible, promote from within (*see Question 16*). Do this constantly and people will see that advancement is possible if they work hard.
- Provide all staff with appropriate training and development opportunities (*see Question 19*).
- Remember to praise good work publicly. People may feel embarrassed, but that doesn't mean they don't want the recognition.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- How well do I really know my staff?
- When was the last time that I thanked or praised a member of staff in private or in public?