

Managing Service Delivery

A fall off in productivity and a decline in customer service, are signs that something is or has gone wrong within the workplace or the general work environment. It is for management to read the signs on the horizon and immediately work to address any emerging issue. It is expected that good employers and managers would always position themselves to be able to anticipate and recognize shortcomings. As it becomes necessary, management should reach out for the assistance of the trade union body which represents the workers. There is nothing the employer stands to lose by embracing the workers' representative, and in working collaboratively to find meaningful and practicable solutions towards addressing the problem(s) at hand.

The problems of declining productivity and poor service delivery have been around for some time. The training of staff has been seen as a means of correcting this problem. Employers may have to take some of the blame for the problems they face, as in many instances they are guilty of not exposing employees to workplace orientation. This is compounded when management does not always pay critical attention to on goings within the workplace, and if and when they do, sometimes fail to act expeditiously to correct the shortcomings.

Management at all times, is ultimately responsible for what happens at the workplace. Instead of recognizing this responsibility, they may sometimes want to accuse the trade union of encouraging the behaviour and actions of their members at the given workplace. This accusation may be levied in the instance where management takes an action and the trade union in representing the interest of the employee(s), as it is expected to do, is able to make a successful intervention. Trade unions as responsible organizations are known to literally call on employees to pull up their boots straps. It is true that employees can mistakenly take this to mean that a behaviour or action is acceptable, and therefore can become very complacent.

Good managers are able to counteract any such perceptions through the engagement of good management and communication systems. Employers and the workers' representative are expected to work to ensure workplace standards are established and observed. Workers who sign on to do a job are expected to follow the workplace and professional standards, and where they deviate from these, it is obvious that they should be consequences. It is accepted that employees are required by law to receive warning letters regarding any breach of their working conditions and observance of workplace standards and policies, it must be clear that management has nothing to fear from the workers' representative body, if the process has been followed.

This brings me to address some of the issues which are evident in workplaces today. In Barbados' banking system, customers invariably encounter extremely long lines, with only two or three tellers at the most, to provide them with service. Very often these tellers take an average of five

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to seven minutes to attend to a customer, and after that at least another three minutes before serving the next customer. They often spend time chatting with their colleague(s) or a customer or friend who comes into the bank. As if this was not enough, while serving a customer, it is the norm for them to leave their station and to go away for a while; supposedly consulting with their supervisor.

If this was not frustrating enough, the dagger is driven home, when a customer on reaching the teller, after standing in line for over an hour, just simply watches in awe as the teller leaves his/her station; supposedly to take a break. There can be nothing wrong with the latter but it is surely discourteous when the teller closes and moves away without any communication to the customer. I was privy to hear a customer who was next in line to be served, querying of a teller where she was going. Her response was blunt. She said..."Have a nice day."

The question is... Where are the managers in these establishments? Is it that they don't know their roles or are they simply too busy or just don't care? Is this the sloppy work attitude and indifference that workers want to portray? We can do a lot better than this. If this attitude and indifference continues to be the norm at both the management and worker level, then we are sure to have a bigger problem in the short, medium and long term, when it comes to seeing any improvements in productivity and service delivery. The conclusion is that service excellence which encompasses, productivity, good customer service and service delivery is seemingly a thing of the past.