

Honesty's key to good management

What's a manager to do about feelings in business? — *Aurelio Collado, Mexico*

Why, manage them, of course. Not to mock your question in the slightest: we're dead serious. If there's one thing that doesn't get enough attention for undermining productivity, creativity and the general smooth functioning of business, it's the mismanagement of emotion in the workplace. Too many managers would rather let people act, well, unmanaged.

Now, we're not even slightly qualified to opine on human nature — well, maybe we're as qualified as the next guy — but you don't have to watch reality TV to know that, if left unattended, people can fall into some pretty dysfunctional behaviours. Maybe it's because gossip, ganging up, paranoia and the like were hard-wired into the human brain to ensure the survival of the species, as some scientists have hypothesised.

But the underlying reasons why groups of people can get so terribly

caught up in negative feelings don't really matter. All that does — from a manager's point of view — is that unhealthy emotions usually beget more unhealthy emotions.

That's why you have to manage them — which, fortunately, takes neither a degree in psychology nor more time than you already have. It takes only an active commitment to remove uncertainty from your organisation and to instil a purposeful approach to inspiration.

Uncertainty first. No manager knows everything about each individual's career trajectory or the company's future plans. But most managers know a lot more than they say.

Since we started travelling around the world in 2002, we have asked audiences for a show of hands in answer to the question: "Over the past year, how many of you have received an honest performance appraisal that really tells you where you stand in the organisation?"

Typically, even with audiences that have been eagerly participating until that moment, we get a 10% "yes" showing; more often than you would believe, we even get less.

That isn't unacceptable: it's outrageous. You may be running a billion-dollar business, moving resources around the globe and presenting stacks of fancy PowerPoint slides to top management, but you simply do not have the right to call yourself a manager if you are not regularly telling your people —

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whether you have three or 13 — what they are doing well and where they need to improve their performance.

In fact, you should be so clear in your evaluations that, should the time ever come to part ways, no employee need ever ask why, he would just ask about "the deal" and



the logistics of a smooth transition.

This kind of candour doesn't come naturally to many managers. Some people would even say it's cruel. We'd say the opposite — lack of candour steals careers, because it's usually too late for an employee to start over by the time he's being told he has to.

As for removing company uncertainty, sharing as much information as possible is invariably the best practice. In particular, no manager should ever commit the all-too-common sin of announcing some layoffs — usually to appease investors after the release of unfortunate results — without also announcing the specifics about when, where and who.

Even when the news is bad, allow people to take their energy off worrying and place it on constructive action, be it restoring results or looking for another job.

Now, to inspiration — or put another way, the transformation of any sort of generic feelings about work into a true passion for the mission. Everyone knows that nothing great ever happens without passion. But too many managers

adjust for that fact with oversize, overheated exhortations about the company's "next big thing".

Enthusiasm doesn't hurt, of course, but authentic passion is sparked by purpose — by people knowing why the organisation is taking a certain path and what the journey will mean to their jobs and lives. Most people don't want to come to the office just to punch a clock; they come to give their lives meaning and dignity. You can help by showing your people how their work matters to the organisation, the community and even the world.

And not just with a speech once a year at the staff party, but every single chance you get — hallways, lifts and parking lots included.

After all, people are all a manager has to work with.

*Jack and Suzy Welch are the authors of the international bestseller **Winning**. They look forward to answering your questions in future columns.*

You can e-mail them at Winning@nytimes.com. Please include your name, occupation, city and country.