

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



857 Management Help From Elon Musk

He's in the news frequently. Self-driving automobiles, solar power battery systems, private space travel, his constant feud with Amazon chairman Jeff Bezos, and once or twice having been the richest person on the planet. I'm Jerry Roberts, he's Elon Musk, and I think we can learn from a couple of the things he's said about the workplace. That's next, on The Extra Point.

Regardless of what your opinion is of Elon Musk, I'm here to say that he's got ideas we can all make use of. Here's just two things he's said that I think can work for pretty much all of us.

1. Get rid of big meetings. Do you have a regular Monday morning gathering where all managers attend, or perhaps even the whole team? Musk would say to cancel regular meetings, gathering only when there is a seriously important reason to do so.

In meetings like those, it's typical for just a handful of people to do all the talking, and maybe a very small handful at that. The majority of people just sit silently, and wait for it to end. Why not just send them an email with the notes?

Yes, I know that there may be an occasional need to assemble the whole crew. Fine, do it when you really need to. Even then, keep those types of meetings as short as possible.

Don't think smaller meetings get a pass here. Musk's whole approach to meetings is to only have them when truly necessary.

Ask yourself a question. How many of the meetings you called or attended actually had to be a meeting, and how many could have been replaced by emails?

If you're a manager, next you can ask your team members the same question, and see how they respond.

2. Don't let hierarchy make communication more difficult. Musk said this in an internal company letter: "Communication should travel via the shortest path necessary to get the job done, not through the 'chain of command'. Let's examine it further.

Musk went on to explain that a major problem between departments is poor communication, and poor communication is often having to send things up through the chain of command, let it rattle around for a while, then it comes back down and a lot of time is wasted unnecessarily. It often goes like this:

Front line worker Joe talks to Mary, his boss, about an issue. Mary then talks to Phil, her director. Phil takes it to Paula, a vice-president. Paula brings it to Simon, another VP. Simon hands it off to Bill, the director in the division they need the answer from. Bill carries it to Sheila, the unit manager. Sheila then takes the matter to George, the front line guy who will actually do the work. This sequence would put Musk on oxygen.

He says if you do it this way, it takes far too long to get the information you need. Plus, it's going to hit so many hands, it's likely to stop because somebody is too busy to give it attention — or something is likely to get screwed up.

Musk says the far better way is to let the two front line workers communicate directly and make the right thing happen.

I know that is a terrifying thought for some managers. It's especially upsetting for those who put rules in place to force this chain of command style communication.

(Con't.)

Growing a team and empowering them to make decisions means that you try to see that issues are solved by the people closest to the situation.

Strip away excess layers of communication. Learn to become a champ at delegating work to others. This helps them grow, and encourages greater accountability. And it puts you in line with Elon Musk. Congratulations.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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