

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1699 Avoiding Middle Manager Burnout

We've talked a fair amount about burnout in recent episodes, and that's because it's real and it's a growing factor in most workplaces. It can impact people at all organizational levels, and today we'll focus on middle managers, a group that is particularly vulnerable. I'm Jerry Roberts, and that's next on the Extra Point.

In many organizations you find four levels of employees. Front line, supervisor, middle manager, and then the executives, directors, commanders — the top leaders.

The front line is task oriented and handles the daily transactions. They answer to supervisors. Supervisors monitor productivity to deliver the results needed to fuel stability and growth. They answer to middle management.

I'll skip a level for a moment and move on to the leaders. Leadership focuses on the larger picture, where the enterprise is headed and the best way to get it there. They don't answer to anyone, unless you want to toss in outside investors or bankers.

Of course, in some cases there could be a regional manager, or headquarters elsewhere. This goes for all sectors — private, government, and military.

However, in most cases here in Guam, the leadership is the ultimate authority.

You'll noticed I skipped over our friends the middle managers, and now we'll focus there.

In the view of many, middle management is the toughest place to be. The demands are heavy, and often nonstop.

A middle manager has to have one eye on what the front line is doing and to support the supervisory level, while having the other one on that big picture that leaders are or should be developing and pushing.

They live in both worlds, and often act as the connecting point between the two.

Essentially, they have two masters, and both can be demanding. Endless meetings and shifting priorities don't make things easier. It's a balancing act between catering to the needs of those on the transactional side, to dealing with the desires, goals and often whims of their bosses.

Yes, burnout is real, and that can lead to depression. Fast Company magazine recently covered this topic, something I deal with in our management training, and here are three things you can do if you're in this position.

1. Block time for important work. Maybe it's an hour or two a day, or four per week; schedule time with yourself to get your most important work done.

Fight the urge to give this time away. You may have to tell you boss that you're in the middle of something really important, and can you see them in a couple of hours instead of right now?

Maybe this will include projects that you can never find time to start because of your hectic schedule. This helps a little on that big picture stuff.

2. Group similar meetings together. You could schedule all one-on-one meetings with your supervisors on one day, not scattered all over your week. When we look at our weekly load, and it is scattered, that can add stress.

Are there tasks that you do or participate in on a regular basis, that can be grouped like this?

No, it's not a perfect strategy. Sometimes, you can put everything together and sometimes you can't. It's okay, make progress as you can.

3. Learn to delegate like a champ. To go after that larger picture and dedicate enough time to growing an enterprise, or department, or unit, you must have sufficient time to work "on" the business, not "in" the business. Here's the place where so many entrepreneurs fail. (Con't.)

They get so caught up in the day-to-day operations — the transactional side — that they don't have time to do the necessary things to grow. If this continues long term, the organization will suffer, and perhaps fail.

Strengthen the people who report to you, and hand off everything you can that doesn't demand your highest talents, and which will drain your time.

If you do, you help your people grow in skill, responsibility, and accountability. That's a bonus, on top of you having more time to leading growth.

If you're in leadership and need help with this, connect with me through guamtraining.com.

Ultimately, the role of a middle manager is to inspire and empower their teams. However, it's challenging to do so when bogged down by busywork and things that take you away from what you do best, and is most important.

Doing these things will not only reduce stress and chance of burnout, but will strengthen your team and make your role more rewarding.

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

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For information on training and consulting services with Jerry Roberts, please click this link: guamtraining.com

