

Involved leaders help define importance of time management

By Scott Woosley

Effective leaders guide organizations to success. They empower employees, value employee input, give feedback to their employees, and develop environments where employees feel that they are making a difference.

The Defense Distribution Center established a leadership development program in 2005 to help cultivate effective and trained leaders. The program provides training in effective leadership behaviors, but feedback from students who had attended the training had a common theme.

Supervisors and managers from all across DDC reported that they had a much better understanding that their role includes coaching, teaching, leading, building trusting relationships and managing conflict. However, they said they were often so busy with the technical requirements of managing that they found it challenging to make time for the human side of being a supervisor.

“Many of our supervisors simply said they didn’t have the time to accomplish all of this,” said Ed Visker, an architect of the course and deputy commander of Defense Distribution Depot Susquehanna, Pa.

In response to that feedback, the “Advanced Leadership: Managing Time” class was offered to help supervisors increase their self-awareness and better manage their time.

Managing time training for individuals in the work force is often as simple as teaching them to organize themselves and plan out their day. For leaders however, managing time is more of a way to establish an environment that gives their employees more time to accomplish their tasks.



For example, if a supervisor holds a meeting that should last 30 minutes and the meeting ends up lasting three hours, that means that not only did the supervisor lose two-and-a-half hours of productive time, but so did the 10 staff members who attended the meeting. That's 27-and-a-half hours of lost time, or more than three individual work days.

Visker was more concerned about another issue though. He discovered that a lot of their senior managers were retaining decision-making authority that was better suited to mid-level managers and, in some cases, to employees on the floor.

By continuing to make those decisions at their level, leaders lost time that could have been spent on other projects.

"Almost every supervisor who participates in the course finds something that they can delegate during the course, that they haven't yet delegated," said Deborah Wood of Business Development Resources Inc., who teaches the course. "Changes to administrative work—delegating portions that can be delegated, reducing unnecessary steps and minimizing supervisor and manager involvement—free them up for other things."

The course teaches students that delegating decision-making authority is also a time-management issue, not solely a leadership issue.

"We want to get decisions made at the lowest level necessary," said Visker, who is also a retired U.S. Army colonel. "That requires us to properly train those individuals to understand the tasks and to think (about the ultimate goal)."

According to John Destalo of the DDC Organizational Development Office, the basic idea behind the time management course is to give DDC's leaders the skills they need to manage their days instead of each day's events controlling them.

"One of the keys to this training is that all these lessons require the

development of skills, and mastering these skills requires practice," Destalo said. "They won't leave this class and be time-management experts, but by being given the basic tools and then following up with the opportunities to practice and develop these skills over time, they will become masters and hopefully teach their teams the same skills."

Destalo says that it has been critical that DDC's leaders at each organization have been directly involved in the development and delivery of the course.

"They manage the environment in which the leaders of their organization operate, so only they can create the context in which the leaders master these skills," he explained.

Destalo also points out that having these skills spread throughout the organization benefits everyone because employees will become more aware of how they are using their time as well as how they are using their co-workers' time.

At DDSP, Visker has been an avid proponent of the time-management course and even schedules a personal visit to each class.

"He introduces every session with a powerful talk on leadership and helps supervisors understand what he wants from them in managing, developing people, utilizing everyone's talents and abilities, being strategic and creative, looking for ways to improve workflow as well as developing others and managing their personal time better," Wood said.

"DDSP management conducts a graduation where they listen to the results from the last case in the course on improving workflow and they take notes, address concerns, listen to action plans and distribute course certificates," Wood added.

"My hands-on involvement is intended to convey how important I feel this is," Visker said. "If the senior leadership is engaged, then the folks will see that this is more than just another training course."

DDSP employees who complete

the course provide their action plans to Visker, who brings the plans to the 90-day reunions with the class and asks his leaders for updates on their progress and any challenges they've encountered.

Visker says the reunions are well-attended and very much appreciated. Visker connects with participants after graduation to follow up on key ideas that are good for the organization.

Visker feels so strongly about the course that he is requiring all 394 of DDSP's supervisors and team leaders to take the course.

"People come into the program and rethink some of their leadership efforts regarding how they delegate, coach and empower or disempower the people they manage," Wood said.

The goal is to teach managers how to set priorities well, reduce unnecessary delays and correct workflow deficiencies, and to understand how that makes their organization more productive. A focus on developing a strategic, higher-level outlook is also emphasized.

Training Program Manager Kim McDonald sends surveys to participants four months after they have completed the course to determine if they have been able to apply what they have learned. Responses show that they are making positive changes.

She says comments have ranged from, "More time is now spent planning workload and delegating it, so that employees are gaining confidence and becoming more empowered to perform at higher levels." to "Our meetings are shorter and directed to the real issues at hand."

Visker also views improving the relationship between managers and employees as a time-saving issue. He wants to ensure that employees on the floor feel valued by their supervisors and empowered to suggest changes that would benefit the organization. "They are the subject matter experts," he emphasized. "Our managers deserve to be taught cutting edge management techniques."