



Reliability Center, Inc.  
www.Reliability.com  
804-458-0645  
info@reliability.com

## **Workers Are Industry's Most Important Resource: Harness Their Power by Mastering the Art of Serving**

Charles J. Latino, RCI President & Founder, 1929-2007

A realization that appears to be taking hold in corporate America today is that the answer to increased productivity and higher profits lies not in downsizing or even computers. Rather, it is the people who operate our plants and build our products who are our most precious assets.

As such, they must be nurtured, encouraged, and supported. Managers must create cultures and environments that unleash the power of learned skills, innate intelligence, and natural instincts. Properly instilling this new culture requires a radical shift in the way the role of the manager is defined. We must understand what workers need to perform and provide it.

Training, incentives, rewards, and recognition are only a few of the ways to promote this culture. Workers must also be given the freedom to think, and the time to do it. Managers must be willing to abandon rigid traditions that hinder worker creativity, initiative, and productivity. Once expectations have been set, we must serve the needs of our workers rather than expecting them to fulfill subservient roles.

Managers can serve their workers and their companies in several ways.

- Train workers to think logically and provide them with the analytical skills needed to identify and solve problems.
- Know what employees are learning and support them by creating an environment that encourages problem solving.
- Provide *champions* to remove barriers as they surface and mentors to guide and reassure employees as they begin to implement new ways of thinking and working.
- Eliminate rigid systems that waste time and hinder innovative thinking. Replace them with systems that support creativity and initiative.
- Recognize and reward those who have embraced the new culture and achieved success.

### **Train Workers to Think Analytically**

Every worker possesses the innate ability to be a problem-solver and most want to bring more to their jobs than the routine tasks they are asked to perform day after day. Solving problems efficiently and consistently through the application of analytical thought processes requires learned skills. When workers acquire these skills and apply them routinely in the field, the results can be remarkable in terms of increased productivity, reduced downtime, and higher profits.

Nowhere is this more demonstrable than in root cause analysis. It is estimated that maintenance could be reduced 40% to 60% by eliminating chronic equipment and system failures. Employees trained in basic analytical skills can better identify and eliminate these chronic failures. Trained workers develop more confidence, a stronger sense of self-worth, and a feeling of contributing to the company's growth and well-being.

### **Understand and Support Workers**

At some point in almost every training class, students ask, “Have our managers attended this class? Do they know what we are leaning here?” When the answer is no, enthusiasm drops. The students know from experience that what they learn in class is unlikely to be applied in the field, because management has had little or no involvement in the process and has not supported it. Management must serve employees by setting up and supporting an infrastructure (including management systems) to facilitate the application of training in the field.

### **Champion and Mentor the Cause**

Employees may embrace new skills enthusiastically, but hesitate to use them because they are uncertain of success. To eliminate the fear that their efforts will not be supported, they need a management-level *champion* to oversee the failure analysis/problem-solving efforts, provide resources, and eliminate organizational barriers to success. They also need mentors to reassure and guide them toward robust and powerful solutions.

Mentors and champions are people who oversee the training and assist in its implementation. Although this task sounds easy and logical, it is often a paradigm shift, because it puts management in a position of serving the educational and analytical needs of its workers. When the newly trained employees and their champions and mentors work together, they produce what may be called *trophies* or models of success that serve as standards for the rest of the organization.

### **Eliminate Rigid Outmoded Systems**

One difficult challenge in establishing this new environment of worker initiative and creative thinking is removing the barriers that impede performance. Too often, managers recognize and act on mechanical failures but ignore process and administrative failures. These failures may range from outmoded and time-consuming chores to administrative processes that promote competition rather than cooperation.

Remember, many systems and processes used today were instituted to serve perceived administrative needs. In a new environment of worker-generated innovation and creativity, they are not outmoded. If they get in the way of progress, they should be eliminated. New systems should be implemented that support employees’ new skills, enthusiasm, and initiative.

### **Reward and Recognize Workers**

Rewards and recognition are distinctly different but equally important ways to reinforce management support. Rewards do not have to be financial. If they are, they must be given uniformly regardless of the dollar impact of an action. Reward an employee for implementing a process successfully, however big or small the result may be.

While rewards add something to the pocketbook, recognition nurtures the heart and soul. It builds pride and self-esteem. It reassures and affirms to workers that management genuinely understands, appreciates, and supports their efforts. Recognition takes many forms, but whatever it is, it should be genuine and consistent.

Workers are the most important assets in any company. When managers realize the potential for savings that exists from optimizing processes and minimizing costs is far greater than that achieved by reducing the workforce, genuine quantum leaps in profitability can be made. Then we will all serve our companies and ensure a profitable, competitive future for all.

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*Charles J. Latino, (1929-2007) Founder of Reliability Center, Inc., was a chemical engineer with a background in psychology and human factors engineering. He was a leader in the development of an integrated approach to*

*achieving greater reliability in manufacturing and industrial systems and processes. He served as consultant to many companies in the United States and abroad. He is the author of Strive for Excellence...The Reliability Approach. He has left his Reliability legacy to his wife and five children who continue to spread his visionary Reliability Approach to companies throughout the world.*