

# Solutions

"The problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

Albert Einstein

Online Performance Strategies for Managers and Supervisors from the Division of Personnel

## Fall 2006 CONTENTS

Page 1

The Link between  
Motivation and Innovation

Page 2

Wisdom of the Ages

Page 3

Learn to FACE Your Staff

What Is an Adverse  
Employment Action?

Page 4

Are there New Rules for Winning  
Organizations?

Page 5

Examining the Classification  
Review Process

Page 6

How Managers' Behavior can  
Sabotage Performance

The Last Straw

## Quick Tip:

From the editors of *Solutions*

**Any person can guide a ship in peaceful waters.** What separates good managers from exceptional managers is the ability to lead during daunting times. Managers tend to become relaxed and unworried about their next move when things are *going well*. However, the best time to plan ahead is when things are *going well!* A manager needs to look ahead to see if there are rough seas of change ahead and make a plan of action.

There are always many choices, many paths to take. One is easy. And its only reward is that it's easy.

Anonymous

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## FEATURE ARTICLE

Creative Thinking

## The link between motivation and innovation

Source:

By Don Jacobson

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**The U.S. Army's top leadership recently did a very smart thing: They listened to one of their enlisted men.**

After returning from the war in Afghanistan, Master Sergeant Rudy Romero sent a long, insightful email to a former commanding officer about the suitability of the equipment that the Army provides to GIs. The recipient forwarded the message to a few colleagues who forwarded it to a few more until, ultimately, it reached the Army's most senior enlisted soldier and the Army Chief of Staff. They took Romero's insights seriously and, as a result, the Army is now making numerous changes to equipment design and procurement.

Every government agency (and every large organization for that matter) has a number of front-line employees, like Romero, who have a gift for identifying better ways of doing things. Just about everyone else has good ideas from time to time as well. The question is, *does management encourage everyone to contribute their ideas and then implement the best ones?*

Employees in most organizations would like to feel that their ideas can make a difference in their workplace. For many people, in fact, there are few things more motivating than seeing--and assisting

with--the successful implementation of an idea they suggested. The scarcity of this motivational force may be one of the biggest reasons why so many government employees feel that they are powerless and unable to change "the system."

All too often, supervisors overlook the possibility that their employees may be an untapped gold mine of good ideas. Sometimes this may be out of hubris, with the manager feeling that he/she knows best. In other cases, managers may ignore line employees' ideas out of insecurity, feeling threatened by subordinates who prove to be highly competent and creative.

No one has a monopoly on good ideas, however. Managers who are aggressive about eliciting the ideas of their staff find that getting everyone involved in the effort to improve the operation has an incredible multiplier effect on the rapidity of the change process and the commitment of employees to those changes. To do this, managers need to foster a climate of openness that gets employees engaged in the process of innovation and organizational renewal.

This article outlines five practices which, implemented together, represent an integrated approach to innovation and employee motivation that has proven to be very effective in the government context.

Continued on Page 2



## The Anchor of Attitude

Real optimism is aware of problems but recognizes the solutions, knows about difficulties but believes they can be overcome, sees the negative but accentuates the positives, is exposed to the worst but expects the best, has reason to complain but chooses to smile.

William Arthur Ward

## The link between motivation and innovation

*Continued from page 1*

**Get to know every employee.** It is virtually impossible for a mid-level manager to motivate his/her employees without getting to know them. Whenever starting a new job, all managers should make a point of having a one-on-one meeting with each member of their staff. Managers who do not know what makes each employee tick will find it very difficult to motivate them. Similarly, if the manager does not know an employee's strengths, he will be unlikely to find the right role for them. These one-on-one sessions are a great opportunity to encourage employees to contribute their ideas.

**Challenge them to improve the operation.** One way for managers to make it clear that they welcome input and suggestions is to give each employee a clear mandate in their work requirements to take a hard look at the whole operation and make recommendations for improvements. This sets down a marker that all employees are expected to contribute their ideas. It is equally important to comment on each employee's efforts in this area at evaluation time.

**"Customer for a Day."** Another mechanism manager can use to elicit suggestions is to have each employee be "Customer for a Day." In offices that have customers, whether they be internal or external, it can be quite enlightening to look at the operation from the client's point of view. The most engaged and creative employees (i.e. the "Master Sergeant Romeros" of the operation) will probably identify a long list of things that can be improved to make the customer's experience more comfortable, transparent and efficient. At a minimum, the experience will sensitize employees to any hardships experienced by the customer. (Note: Employees would not really be "Customer" for the whole day. But they should be given sufficient time to go all the way through the process, and then to write up their impressions and suggestions for the supervisor.)

**The Great Idea Award.** It is also important to find a way to reward or recognize employees whose suggestions help improve the operation. One option is to establish a Great Idea Award and give the recipient a customized certificate. Managers at agencies that offer cash awards to employees who make money-saving suggestions should find out the procedures and use that mechanism whenever appropriate.

**Don't forget the implementation.** A crucial part of this whole equation is the actual implementation of the great ideas generated by employees. Without follow-through, the organization simply ends up with a long list of unused suggestions-and a lot of frustrated employees. To the extent possible, managers should put the person who suggested a great idea in charge of the actual implementation. The initiator of an innovative idea usually has a sense of ownership and is highly motivated to see their suggestion put into effect. Those managers who try to take the lead on all new initiatives will find themselves overworked and unable to accomplish everything they would like. By delegating the implementation, the managers can give their employees a terrific developmental opportunity, with the manager just needing to provide guidance and support.

These are just a few suggested methods for encouraging employees to contribute their ideas for improving their organization. Implemented on their own, each of these practices would have limited impact. The key is to use a multifaceted approach that continually reinforces the fact that employees' ideas are welcome, valued, and rewarded. It would be awesome to see how much an organization's effectiveness could be improved if all managers were to systematically seek out and implement these kinds of suggestions from front-line employees.



Integrity

## Wisdom of the ages

If you gathered 100 experienced managers together and asked for their advice, they probably wouldn't say much about "competing values models" or temporal rhythms." Instead, this is a good idea of what you'd hear:

***"Don't be afraid of the phrase, "I don't know."*** If you don't know the answer, don't try to bluff. If you're at fault, take the blame. If you're wrong, apologize. A wise person once said, "If you tell the truth, you never have to remember anything."

***"Never Gossip."*** And if someone wants to gossip with you, politely say you're not interested. This corporate adage rings true: When someone gossips, two careers are hurt – the person being talked about, and the person doing the talking.

***"No task is beneath you."*** Don't think you are above anything. Be the good example and pitch in – especially if the job is one that nobody else wants to do.

***"Share the credit whenever possible."*** Managers who spread credit around look much stronger than those who take all the credit themselves.

***"Ask for help."*** If you think you're in over your head, you are. Before it gets out of hand, ask someone for help – most people enjoy giving a hand. Besides saving yourself from embarrassment, you'll make a friend and an ally.

***"When you don't like someone, don't let it show,"*** especially if you outrank them. Never burn bridges or offend other as you move ahead.

***"Let it go."*** What shouldn't happen often does: You weren't given the project you wanted, you were passed over for the promotion you deserved. Whatever the circumstance, be gracious and diplomatic...and move on. Harboring a grudge won't advance your career.

***"When you're right, don't gloat."*** The only time you should ever use the phrase "I told you so" is if someone says to you "You were right. I really could succeed at that project."

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## Verbal Communication

# Learn to FACE your staff

Are you a good listener? Most people think they are, and most people are wrong. In the workplace, poor listening skills contribute to misunderstanding and time-wasting errors. The inability to really hear what others are saying leads to lower productivity, lower morale and increase turnover.

So, how do you decrease turnover...how do you increase your listening skills? **FACE your employees and connect:**

**Focus on the listener.** Serious listening means tuning out noise, distractions and other priorities. Set aside a specific time to invite employees to discuss challenges they might be facing.

**Acknowledge your listener** by nodding, smiling, sitting forward and adding comments such as "Yes, go on" and "I see." Most important, hold eye contact.

**Clarify.** Active listening requires that you understand not only the content of the information, but the intent. Example: "You say you want to be taken off the Jensen account. Are you too busy to handle it, or is there some other problem?"

**Empathize.** Many of us want to be problem solvers. When people vent, we offer suggestions when what they really want is someone to hear them out. Instead of quickly offering a solution, spend some time listening. You'll often find that most people know how to resolve their problems; they just need to hash it out for themselves.

-Adapted from "Bottom Line Listening," Wicke Chambers and Spring Asher, Innovative Leader, [www.winstonbrill.com](http://www.winstonbrill.com)  
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## Workforce Management

# What Is An Adverse Employment Action?

In the last edition of *Solutions* it was noted that the United States Supreme Court would be deciding what an adverse employment action is in the case of *Burlington Northern & Santa Fe Railway Co. v. White*, No. 05-259. On June 22, 2006, the United States Supreme Court issued its opinion on this matter.

In *Burlington Northern*, a female forklift operator was transferred to a more physical job after she filed a complaint accusing her supervisor of sexual harassment. Although she was reassigned to a position within her job classification (Track Laborer) her primary responsibility prior to the complaint was operating a forklift. Under her new assignment, she was required to perform her duties without the assistance of a forklift, which in this case the Supreme Court ruled was an adverse action in retaliation of the employee's harassment allegations.

Title VII forbids an employer from discriminating against an employee or applicant because he or she has opposed a practice that Title VII forbids or has made a charge, testified, assisted, or participated in a Title VII investigation proceeding or hearing.

Prior to this case the federal appellate courts had been split as to what was required to prove an adverse employment action. The Supreme Court held that a plaintiff must show that a reasonable employee would have found the challenged action materially adverse. In other words, would the alleged action by the employer dissuade a "reasonable worker" from making or supporting a charge of discrimination? This standard is meant to prevent an employer from intimidating employees

from reporting Title VII violations for fear of the actions taken by the employer against them.

The Supreme Court further noted that these cases must be determined on a case-by case basis. For instance, an employee's decision to report discriminatory behavior cannot immunize the employee from petty slights or minor annoyances. However, the Court gave two examples which may be grounds for a retaliation claim. The first involved a schedule change of an employee. While a normal schedule change may make little difference to most workers, the Court noted that it would matter enormously to a single mother with school aged children. The second involved a supervisor's refusal to invite an employee to lunch. Normally this would be a petty slight. If, however, the luncheon involved training that contributed significantly to the employee's professional advancement then it could well be said this was done to deter a reasonable employee from complaining.

In sum, all employment actions should have a rational basis that does not demonstrate an attempt to retaliate against an employee. Although there is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach to determining whether or not an action is adverse and retaliatory, treating all employees equally no matter how a supervisor feels will ensure that you are not found in violation of Title VII.

Written by:  
Frank Jung, Assistant General Counsel for the  
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## Are there new rules for winning organizations?

In a recent *Fortune Magazine* article entitled, "The New Rules" (VOL. 154, NO. 2 - July 24, 2006), author Betsy Morris contends that in the last few decades the route to success once followed by many managers and organizations has become outdated based on our changing times. Morris states that today's leaders need a new "playbook" if they are to be successful, or at least a few new rules to follow.

While not everyone may agree with Morris, some of what she said may be worthy of further thought. This article will explore a few of her observations to show how some OLD RULES may need to make way for the new. You, the reader can be the judge in determining if the NEW RULE truly applies to you and your work team.

**OLD RULE:** Be No. 1 or 2 in your field.  
**NEW RULE:** Create something new.

There is an old saying that goes. "If you do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got." However, today many people may theorize that even this old phrase is outdated. In reality, they believe that you will actually lose ground – you can't do what you've always done and expect to stay in the same place. You've got to find your niche (or find a better way to do business) if you want to remain viable.

Case in point: the State of Missouri's Electronic Application System (EASe) used to establish and maintain registers of eligible applicants for employment opportunities in Merit System agencies. From 2000 – 2005 (prior to EASe), it took an average of 20 days to process an application and add an applicant's name to the register. However, as a result of EASe, many applicants receive scores and are placed on registers within seconds. The numbers of paper applications are down from 28,000 to 5,000 a year,

resulting in paper applications being processed in 6 days.

**OLD RULE:** Be lean and mean.  
**NEW RULE:** Look out, not in.

No organization can afford to spend too much time in self-analysis. Agencies need to be more forward-facing in the future than they have been in the past. We all cringe when faced with change. However, it's not about change. It's about finding other ways to deal with the need to change and come out ahead.

For example, as our state and nation continue to face challenges related to illegal immigration; Governor Matt Blunt directed all executive branch state agencies to implement a new hiring procedure to verify employees' identity and work eligibility. A program administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) under the Department of Homeland Security will allow state agencies to enter information into an automated system and verify that the state employees we hire are legally authorized to work in the United States. Most information can be verified within 3-5 seconds, making this a valuable and easy-to-use tool for state agencies.

**OLD RULE:** Rank your players; go with the top performers.  
**NEW RULE:** Hire passionate people.

While it is important to provide feedback to every employee about their performance and job expectations, "people don't come to work to be No. 1 or No. 2," Christopher Bartlett of Harvard Business says. "They want a sense of purpose. They come to work to get meaning from their lives." People have an innate desire to achieve at higher levels and will do so if managers can provide them with the tools, resources

and environment to become the best they can be.

**OLD RULE:** Hire charismatic people.  
**NEW RULE:** Hire brave people.

Finally, as Morris contends, leadership is not about following the rules of the past. It is about standing up for what you believe is best, regardless of the consequences. Not always an easy or popular thing to do.

Today's leaders and/or managers must deal with continual, rapid change. Managers faced with a major decision can't always refer back to an earlier developed plan for direction. Management techniques must continually notice changes in the environment and organization, assess those changes and manage them. Managing change does not mean controlling it, rather understanding it, adapting to it where necessary and guiding it when possible.

Written by:  
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Sources:  
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## Technical Knowledge

# Examining the Classification Review Process

Classification review is a process used by the Division of Personnel (DOP) to ensure that new and existing positions are correctly classified based upon the duties and responsibilities assigned. This is an important process for maintaining the integrity of the Uniform Classification and Pay System, fairly compensating employees for work performed, and establishing and maintaining organizational structures for state agencies. Although this process can be complicated, through cooperation between the agencies and DOP staff, it can be simplified and completed within a reasonable timeframe.

A position review may be initiated by an employee, an agency, or the DOP. The most common requests are submitted by state agencies to set up new positions or review existing positions due to changes in duties and/or staffing needs. These requests may be as simple as reviewing one position to determine its correct level, or as complex as allocating several new positions in various classifications and levels for a newly formed work unit. Often, position reviews are requested by an employee who feels that he or she is performing work beyond the current classification of the position. In some cases the DOP will initiate reviews based on inconsistencies or questions that arise in connection with other reviews. Position reviews are also completed at the end of an incumbent's probationary period to ensure the duties remain appropriate for the classified title.

The primary tool used in classification reviews is the Position Description Form, also known as a PDF. If the position in question is currently occupied, the incumbent completes the applicable sections of this form, and then forwards it to the supervisor who also provides information specific to the position. Next, the appointing authority (typically the department director or his or her designee) may provide a recommendation and the PDF is submitted to the agency's personnel office.

The agency personnel representative must then ensure the accuracy and completeness of the PDF and may provide additional information to be submitted to the DOP.

Information that is required to process the PDF includes the agency, unit, title and position codes as well as signatures of the incumbent, supervisor, and appointing authority. The agency personnel office should also attach an updated organizational chart of the affected work area which indicates how the position under review fits into the organizational structure. This chart should include the classified title, the organizational code, and the entire position code as it appears in SAM II for each position listed.

A cover letter explaining the purpose of the review is then prepared and attached to the PDF, organizational chart, and any other pertinent information; and the entire packet is sent to the Employee Services section of the DOP.

If the position being reviewed is a Broadbanded Manager, a Position Questionnaire for Broadbanded Managers must be submitted instead of the PDF along with the associated Position Evaluation Rating Form.

Once this packet is received, it is assigned to the analyst or unit that works with the requesting agency. After the packet is reviewed to ensure that all required information has been provided, a preliminary review of the recommended title(s), job duties, and organizational structure is conducted to determine what classifications and allocated positions should be used as comparisons. The job duties listed on the PDF are then compared to the class specifications of the current class title, the proposed class title, other titles within the same series, and any other class titles with similar duties and responsibilities. If applicable, comparisons are also made to the PDF previously submitted for this position and on file with the DOP.

This comparison is made to determine if there has been any significant change of assigned duties, responsibility, and delegated authority. PDF's may also be reviewed of the supervisor, subordinates, counterparts, or other similar positions within the agency or in other agencies if needed.

If, after making such comparisons, the analyst is unable to make a determination, additional information may be requested. This could entail the supervisor or other designated staff answering a few simple written questions to clarify issues relating to the position, new PDF's for other affected positions, or an on-site or telephone audit. An audit may last from an hour to several hours depending upon the complexity of the position.

After careful evaluation of all the information reviewed, the analyst will make an allocation decision and the agency's personnel representative will be notified by memorandum or email. This determination will include the allocation decision, justification for the decision, and an effective date if any change is being made.

The allocation decision is based upon the duties, responsibilities, and authority of the position, not the incumbent or the quantity or quality of work. However, if any reallocation decision may affect the current incumbent, the reviewing analyst will work with the agency to ensure that appropriate personnel action(s) are completed.

Receiving accurate and thorough information at the beginning of a position review will expedite the process of determining correct position allocation. By working together, the agency and the Division of Personnel can make the sometimes complicated process of classification review much easier for everyone involved.

Written by:  
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## How managers' behavior can sabotage performance: Tactics that work to raise employee productivity

HR people wear a lot of hats: Recruiting and retention director, employment law expert, employee advocate. And these days, there's a new one: Bottom-line booster.

How's that done? By helping supervisors learn the management techniques that make employees more productive.

### A matter of expectations:

Lately, consultants are talking about a "new" theory (one you've probably understood all along):

### Employees perform – well or not so well – in response to their bosses expectations.

There's even a fancy name for this phenomenon: The Pygmalion Effect (as when Professor Higgins transforms Eliza Doolittle from flower girl to duchess). But let's fast-forward through the "psychotheory" and get down to the nuts-and-bolts:

### What steps can managers take to help their people thrive?

The first place to look is each supervisor's behavior and management style. A key is how supervisors treat their lower-performing workers. (We're not talking about the lowest-performing people. They're probably not going to be around long. Managers should be aiming at workers with the potential for substantial improvement.)

Some behaviors for supervisors to be aware of:

- **Paying less attention** to low-performing employees than high performers in normal workplace interactions – talking to them less, maintaining shorter eye contact, involving them less often in discussions of current projects.

- **Criticizing** low-performers more often than their others.
- **Praising** low-performers **less often**.
- **Giving** low-performers less accurate **feedback**.
- **Demanding less effort** from low-performers, because of the expectation they won't do well, and
- **Calling on low-performers less frequently** to work on special projects, and **giving them less information** about what's going on in their department.

The good news:

Those are some of the danger areas. Here's what the experts recommend as the positive steps managers can take:

- **Provide coaching, not merely criticism.** These one-on-one sessions should emphasize building on employees' successes, not dwelling on past failures.
- **Give everybody an equal shot at the "special" projects.** Employees can't improve if they never get an opportunity to do so.
- **Assign a mentor.** Older, more experienced workers can often spur a less-than-stellar employee to greater heights. It a matter of peer pressure – and it often resonates with employees more than an edict from a manager.
- **Keep in touch.** It's a fact that high-performers tend to be more highly regarded by supervisors than the less productive. But not paying as much attention to lower performers tends to reinforce an atmosphere of failure.
- **Give them a good chance to be successful.** If employees are given opportunities in areas where the manager knows they can excel, there's often a positive spillover in other areas of the job.

For a detailed look at "the Pygmalion Effect," go to [www.accelteam.com/pygmalion/index.html](http://www.accelteam.com/pygmalion/index.html)  
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## Mentoring

### Take care not to *demotivate* with the 'last straw'

You know the phrase: *That was the last straw!* The meaning: Someone was just pushed to the breaking point. The result? Resignation, a temper tantrum in front of customers or clients. Maybe worse. The question: *"How do you avoid delivering the straw that breaks the camel's back?"*

Beware of these *demotivators*:

**Dumping.** Do you have an assignment that's extremely time consuming or potentially career breaking? Is it unlike anything your staff has worked on before? Then, for heaven's sake, don't just dump it on some poor unsuspecting worker -

no matter how talented – and leave that person to handle or figure it out alone. First, make sure the employee has the time and skills to cope with a project of this magnitude. Then provide the necessary resources and support. And finally, monitor progress, providing guidance and positive feedback as warranted.

**Disrupting.** Bringing new people into the mix can be a positive experience when they're skilled, trained, and up-to-speed on current projects. But tossing new, unprepared players into an already tight game can undermine your team's cohesiveness and create more problems than it resolves.

**Denying.** When you fail to thank workers for their daily contributions, you miss a golden opportunity to motivate and build loyalty. But when you neglect to appropriately recognize and reward extraordinary efforts or accomplishments, you deny workers their due – and crush their spirit.

Adapted from "memo to managers: The straw that can break the employees back," by Sue Dwan, in *New Zealand Business*  
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