

**Bowerman continued . . .**

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## **“The Japanese still have so much respect for American management.”**

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coupled with their own investments in technology, that created the successful results they are experiencing now. In fact, the top award in Japan for quality and productivity is called the Deming Award, named after an American who taught the Japanese much of what they have developed into the quality control that they use today.

**Q: Why are these American principles working better for the Japanese than they are for us?**

**A:** What the Japanese have done that is so wonderful is to take these basic principles and adapt them excellently to their culture. For example, the (almost) all-male, all-Japanese management is single sex and uni-ethnic. Consequently, there tends to be, not a uniformity, but a lack of diversity in their culture and thinking. That type of structure is advantageous if your goal is to reach consensus, right? In American management, we have the diversity in our thinking, but it's difficult to reach agreement. What we need is a way to reach business decisions and improve productivity that takes advantage of our diversity without creating internal conflicts. We've got to tap our tremendous creativity in a cooperative way, without stifling individual spirit.

**Q: Have any American companies taken advantage of the inherent diversity and yet fostered cooperation?**

**A:** Yes, Hewlett-Packard, Delta Airlines, and IBM have done some excellent things. They also share another characteristic described in Thomas Peters' and Robert Waterman's book, "In Search of Excellence." It's called simultaneous loose-tight properties. Loose in the sense that they have a lot of fluid, informal, flexible communication and yet rigid in the sense of adhering to the values of the

corporation. So if the corporation is driven by a value of "quality products for the consumer," no member of the corporation will bend from that value, regardless. I think another characteristic they share is knowing what the consumer thinks and then adapting to the consumer's reaction to their product or service. I'm not talking about rigid statistical marketing research. I'm talking about *knowing* your customers and meeting their needs. Finally, I think the most important factor in their successful management structure is their recognition of productivity. That means realizing productivity comes from the people who work with you and for you and giving them positive reinforcement.

**Q: What is the best way to give employees positive reinforcement?**

**A:** From top level management down to first-line supervisor, we must communicate that we care. And it's more than listening to personal problems, it's taking the time to let individuals know that we care about the quality of their work. It's encouraging high standards, not only for the benefit of the company, but for the excellence of that employee.

**Q: Employers have not had the time to do that?**

**A:** *Made* the time! It is a skill that needs to be developed. There are many reasons why people sometimes hesitate to give positive reinforcement. Perhaps they fear rejection or they fear that giving other people strokes will make them look less competent. But good management moves beyond the realization that productivity comes through people, and creates ways to demonstrate appreciation. In our introductory level management courses, we're attempting to go one step beyond intellectualizing. We give students

experiential exercises that help them to develop their human relations skills by practicing them in their classroom work groups.

**Q: Will you describe the nontraditional format that you follow in your Advanced Management Block Program offered in the spring?**

**A:** First of all, it's a 12-unit class limited to 21 students. Instead of regular lectures and examinations, students arrange for as many as 40 business professionals to be guest speakers during the semester. They do a bonafide research project and they even counsel businesses in the community. There are no examinations at all—the students learn by doing.

**Q: The students actually counsel businesses?**

**A:** Yes. We call it the Small Business Institute Program and individual faculty members make the arrangements with businesses that would like to have students counsel them on problems they are having. The advantage to the student is that it gives them an opportunity to apply their skills. The advantage to the business is that there is no charge for receiving new ideas or better perspectives. It's always a new experience for students. At first they may feel, "Gosh, what do I have to offer?" So part of my job is to build their confidence and convince them that yes, they can apply their skills and be of help to the business community. It's exciting to see them bridge that gap between the classroom environment and the business community.

**Q: What advice would you give high school students who are planning to major in business administration?**

**A:** They should have a strong math background and develop good writing skills. Clarity in writing will help them tremendously in our program and in their career. Successful writing in business is that which is extremely clear, precise, and so much to the point that it's not excessively wordy. Sometimes, as students, we are fooled into thinking that we'll be rewarded in business for the quantity of writing we put out, and that is rarely the case.