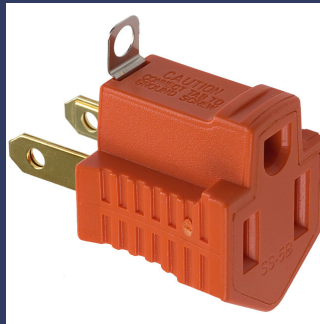




Doug J. Fine, MBA
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Monthly Highlights and Leadership Lessons

February 2010



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Dear Friends,

I send these periodic newsletters hoping you will find their content interesting, thought-provoking and useful. If you like this newsletter, please forward it to colleagues and friends that can also benefit from it.

The Augusta Georgia / Aiken South Carolina area recently had its first snow in over 8 years - about 3-4 inches of fresh white global warming! The kids had a wonderful time out in it and I enjoyed looking at the beauty from within a nice warm house.

There was some sad news last week. Patricia "Pat" Sodomka died after a long battle with cancer. She was a senior executive at MCG Health, Inc. where I used to work and was nationally recognized for her advocacy for Patient and Family Centered Care. I learned a lot from Pat and she was a smart, kind, and inspiring health care leader. I think that Pat led with her heart, maybe even more than her head, and she accomplished so much in the areas that she so deeply believed in. She will be

greatly missed by those who knew her personally and professionally. An article sharing a little glimpse of Ms. Sodomka is available [here](#).

A trusted partnership can begin with our first conversation. Try checking out my [website](#) and if I can be of service please give me a call at 706-726-6307.

Sincerely,

Doug

"They"

By Doug Fine

Recently I was shopping at one of the big big box home improvement stores that might be recognized by an overabundance of the color orange. I was looking for a three-pronged to two-pronged adapter similar to the photo above. These things were hard to find that day. I looked everywhere, and although there were plenty of orange aprons in sight, no help was being volunteered. So eventually I asked for it. Those plug adapters had to be somewhere.



I asked a nice woman for help. She appeared to want to help me find what I was looking for. So we took a similar route to where I had already sought out the elusive plugs. She was the first to say: "They must have moved them. They're always moving things on us." When we still could not locate the little buggers, she asked another co-worker to help. That co-worker also said it was the "They" who must have moved them from their logical place. We continued to hunt. I must have heard a few more times how "They" are making too many changes, "They" are moving things around all the time, and "They never tell us anything."

Eventually, another associate located the item and I went on my merry way with a few extra plug adapters that day: first, because I didn't want to have to do this again, and second, because you always need one of those things now and then, don't you?

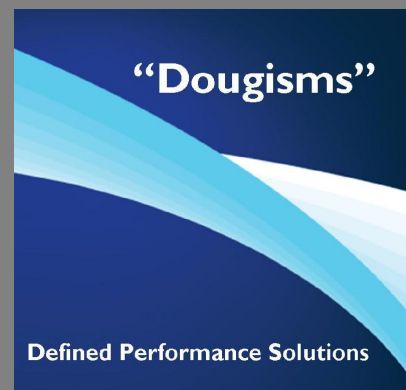
But it was the staffs' continual use of the words "they" that bothered me. These people were clearly employed at the place but for some reason there was a real disconnect between themselves and where they worked, the people they worked for, and the people that moved things around on them. These days when employee "engagement" and "ownership" are bandied about quite a lot, it might be that the concepts are wonderful and valued in the world of corporate HR and Organizational Development, but they have not yet been realized on the warehouse floor where associates interact and serve the customer.

If "they" truly desire ownership and engagement with their team members, "they" better think about better ways to bring it about, because I sure didn't see it that day.

This month's Dougism may provide some hints about some of what is involved in changing things from the "us" / "them" mode to more of a "we" frame of mind at work.

The Monthly "Dougism"

Each newsletter I'd like to give you a little lesson from the learning I have gained in my working life over 25 years in the military and business. I call them Dougisms, but most are not original. I've learned a lot from others and some of these come from the minds and mouths of good people that I have had the privilege of working with. Though I do put a little of my own thinking into them.



This month:

Input = Commitment

No Input = No Commitment

I have often been asked by managers and supervisors: "How can I motivate my staff to get them to do a better job for me?; get them to be more concerned about the business?; get them to work harder?; to get them to be more attentive and responsive to the customer...?"

Not being the answer man, I usually need to ask them a few questions of my own, just after I tell them that they are incapable of motivating any person other than themselves. But that topic will be for another day.

The questions I ask the manager are usually along these lines:

- *Have your people been involved in establishing the purpose, values, and goals of the business?*
- *Have they been asked to provide regular input on what needs to be improved in the business?*
- *Have you set up some simple means of communication where your staff can convey what the customer is saying to them about your business - good, bad, and even ugly?*
- *Have you provided them the ability to handle customer complaints (within certain guidelines) on their own, even to the point of letting them give customers something of value as a means of telling them "we are sorry" for letting them down?*
- *Do you provide an atmosphere at your organization where "crazy" ideas can be brought up by anyone, at any level, to make the business run better, be more profitable, make more sales, improve service to your customers?*
- *Do you think that an "employee of the month" (or something similar) program is adequate to recognize the good work that your staff does on a regular basis?*

Most of these questions, and there are others, get to the heart of this month's Dougism.

There may be nothing more fundamental to an employee's commitment at their job than whether they are allowed to provide input on how their job is done and how the business is run.

A manager may think that they have all the systems and processes at their enterprise well oiled and honed to the point that all an employee has to do is follow them and all will be well. All that is required of staff is for them to comply with the way things are. But **compliance** is a far different concept in a workplace than **commitment**. If a manager's predominant style is to expect people to comply with the status quo, then they have only themselves to blame when they see that commitment, creativity, problem-solving, engagement, and motivation from their employee seems to be lacking.

Conversely, if a manager makes active participation from all employees an expectation of the business then there is a far better chance that employees will themselves be committed to the success of the business. The manager needs to spell out what "active participation" means and set appropriate boundaries so that the inmates-running-the-asylum-syndrome will not arise. For example, it would not be appropriate for all staff to have a say about a major equipment purchase that does not affect their job. But it would be unwise for a business to make such a purchase without including input and the ideas of the people that will be working with it. Being given a say, when appropriate, goes a long way in bringing about a positive reception and commitment to changes that are made in an organization.

Having concrete mechanisms at your business where input from staff is sought, evaluated, and implemented will build an atmosphere of commitment, ownership, better employee and customer relations and more trust. Not allowing input, wrongly thinking that sort of thing takes too much time with too little return, (or for whatever reason) will, at best result in compliance, or worse, have a manager wondering why commitment from employees is completely absent and the status quo continues to reign supreme.

Leaders need to open themselves up to new ways of interacting and provide new expectations of the people that work for them. Moving towards a new culture of participation and input will improve morale, production, profits and result in an enhanced "ownership mentality." That's what managers seem to say that they want, but they themselves have to be different to get their staff to be different.

Because "if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten."

Input = Commitment

No Input = No Commitment

The "New Deal" of Work:

by Doug Fine

If you read my newsletter last month, I discussed the new "psychological contract" that needs to be understood between employees and employers going forward.

I found an interesting post on [David Noer's blog](#) that provided a real-world glimpse into how the psychological contract is understood at various levels of a certain company.

I provide Mr. Noer's post to you verbatim:

I recently conducted an informal survey within one organization concerning perceptions of the "deal" - the psychological employment contract.

I asked professional, non supervisory employees, and most of them said the deal was to work hard, gain transferable skills, and be ready to move to a new organization when the time came because they were convinced it would come for almost everyone.

I asked middle managers and they were confused. They didn't know what the "deal" was but the majority said that it was different than when they came to the organization and it certainly was not life-time employment but they were not sure what it really was. They were defiantly uncomfortable with employees being loyal to their work and profession but not necessary the company but they didn't have any concrete options.

I asked the CEO who had been there 35 years. He said that entry level professionals should work hard, be loyal to the company, not network externally for jobs, and despite the current economic downturn, the company would find ways to take care of good, loyal, hard working employees.

So there you have a snapshot of what's going on. Different levels and different organizational cultures have very different perceptions of the psychological contract and often send out mixed messages.



So what is your perception of "the deal?"

A terrific book that covers this topic in great detail is [*Healing The Wounds: Overcoming the Trauma of Layoffs and Revitalizing Downsized Organizations*](#) by David M. Noer.

Contact Doug

[Fill out an inquiry page.](#)

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