

Know the people who count

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It is extremely important to know the people in your organization who really count, regardless of their position or how much they get paid. If you don't know who counts, it's just a matter of time before you trip over a personnel relations land-mine.

I knew a manager who made a huge mistake once (don't we all). But he shared his mistake with me and I, too, learned some valuable lessons from it--lessons that prevented me from making the same mistake. Let me share his story with you:

He worked for a company that had an evening maintenance man who fixed up odds and ends while the buildings were empty. At the end of each day, he wrote in the maintenance book anything that needed doing, such as changing light bulbs, clearing blocked toilets, fixing furniture, etc. Harry, the maintenance man, would do it. The company had two offices and the manager would get irritated that Harry seemed to spend more time down at the other branch than

at his place. Things never got fixed.

The manager's notes in the maintenance book grew terse and sharper, but it didn't seem to do any good. He would have told off Harry in person if ever he'd have been able to find him. The frustration was mounting--the other office was getting all their repairs done and his office was getting nothing done. The manager decided to stay late one night to discuss the matter with Harry (or basically to catch him in the act of doing nothing).

Harry didn't show, so the manager went over to the other office. There was Harry having coffee with the big boss, the regional director. He stormed in saying: “What the devil do you think you're doing? I need you over at the other place doing some maintenance, not sitting here drinking coffee!” This was a bad mistake. In fact, several bad mistakes:

* You don't bawl someone out for drinking coffee when they were on an official “coffee break.”

* You don't bawl someone out for drinking coffee when they were invited

to do so by the regional director.

* You don't bawl someone out in front of the regional director without first checking on all the facts or circumstances pertaining to the situation.

Why was Harry cleaning the other office and not his? Because he was the regional director's father-in-law. He was working at the other office because he had been told to by his son-in-law. Once again, bad mistake. Harry is someone in the company with informal power. Someone “who counts.” Someone who has an inside track to higher authority, practically immune to any sort of reprimand.

In every company and organization there are people who count. It could be the cashier, the managing director's driver, the accountant, or the cafeteria chef. Right, wrong, or indifferent, they all hold a trump card which either gives them access to a senior boss, or some hold over them such as being a relative. Find them and get to know them in some way.

~ The End ~