

**TITLE: "MANAGING FROM THE BOTTOM-UP"**

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Since 1971: *"Software for the finest computer - the Mind"*

*"If we lived in a perfect world, there would not be a need for managers."  
- Bryce's Law*

*"Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don't interfere."  
- Ronald Reagan (1986)*

When the American colonies were forming a government in the 18th century, there was a fleeting notion that George Washington should become King with absolute power. Instead, our founding fathers opted for a democratic society where officials were elected by the people. The intent was to give the individual citizen a means to participate in the running of the government. This was a wise decision and has served America well for over 225 years. By being included in the process, people align their loyalties to the government and country, and are quick to come to its defense in times of national emergency. Involving the individual is a simple gesture that has had long range positive effects on our country.

It is an interesting dichotomy that whereas our country involves the individual, most of our other institutions do not. I have been fortunate to have traveled the world and have seen many different types of companies, from large to small, and in just about every field of endeavor

imaginable. Most are run top-down with a benevolent (or maybe not so benevolent) dictator at the helm. Assignments, estimates and schedules are pushed down the corporate chain with little regard for the individual employee.

Over the years there has been a lot of discussion about Theories X, Y, and Z in management; whereas "X" is autocratic, "Y" is more of a "carrot and stick" mentality and "Z" promotes individual participation. Remarkably, despite the many years of promoting the rights of the worker, today we primarily live in a Theory X world. Employees are told what to do and when to do it, without any interest in their input. Today, this is commonly referred to as "micro-management." Under this approach, although the work will eventually get done, there is no loyalty to the company by the employee, mistakes are made and quality suffers, and productivity declines since there is no personal sense of urgency by the employee. In other words, the company works, but not like a well-oiled machine.

More recently, I have noticed this same phenomenon occurring in non-profit volunteer organizations, such as homeowner associations, clubs, school organizations, sports associations, even church groups. The people that run these groups may have the best intentions, but rarely do they know how to actually manage. Sadly, some people get involved with such organizations to satisfy a petty power trip they are on. Consequently, they have little regard for organization and adherence to policies and rules. Instead, they try to micro-manage everything. People, particularly volunteers, have a natural aversion to micro-management and quickly lose interest in their work.

Let us always remember that the word "management" begins with "man" for a purpose: it refers to how we interact with people and, as such, it is not a clerical or  
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administrative function, but, rather, a people function; how to work with the human being, a very challenging task considering you are dealing with human beings who can be emotional, irrational, and just plain "thick." There is a countless number of books on the subject of "management" alone. But for our purposes, perhaps the best way to think of "management" is simply "getting people to do what you want, when you want it, and how you want it." If we lived in a perfect world, there would not be a need for managers; people would know what to do, and projects would be executed on time and within cost. However, as we all know, we live in an imperfect world. People do make mistakes and problems arise, hence, the need for "managers", people charged with assigning and directing the work of others. Managers are in the business of solving problems; people problems!

Some of the most productive organizations are those where management succeeded in getting the individual workers involved with the running of the company. Sure, management is still in control, but they have stimulated employee interests by encouraging their participation and feedback. Management still has some top-down responsibilities, including:

1. Delegate - prioritize and assign tasks to qualified employees.
2. Control work environment - minimize staff interferences and provide a suitable workplace to operate with the proper tools to perform the work.
3. Review progress - study employee reports and take corrective action where necessary.

Individual employees have bottom-up responsibilities to management:

1. Participate in the planning process - review work specifications and give feedback; estimate amount of time to perform an assignment, assist in the calculation of work schedules with management.
2. Perform work within time and costs constraints.
3. Report activities to management - including the use of time, interferences, and possible delays.

In this bottom-up approach, employees are treated as professionals and are expected to act as such in return.

This results in far less supervision as found in micro-management. Employees are delegated responsibility, supervise their own activities, and report to management on progress. This approach will work in any business, be it a corporation or non-profit volunteer organization. There is only one catch to this approach: some people resist assuming responsibility for their actions and prefer to have someone else tell them what to do; thereby when something goes awry, they can blame the other person for the snafu. This type of person is more suited for a dictator type of organization where they can continue to grouse about management, yet do nothing to help correct the problem. Aside from this, the benefits of the bottom-up approach far outweigh the negatives. It is simple and it works.

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