



GrowthPort Partners, Inc.

ANOTHER KEY TO ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS:
DROP THE “MAGIC FEATHER”

By

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Remember Dumbo? He was the young circus elephant who was cursed, or blessed, with extra large ears. The bad news was that his ears made him different. The good news was that with them he could fly.

The story is important to business today. It deserves retelling because it involves the challenge of overcoming dependency on external motivation to achieve success. The “command” type of managing has been relied on far too long to give business organizations their basic direction. Giving up “top-down” in favor of “empowering” management, will allow firms to more fully tap their greatest strength --- their human resources.

The story goes that the young elephant truly wanted to be able to perform and contribute to the circus in his own unique way. He had the right equipment. His ears were large enough to provide the necessary lift to allow him to soar above the crowd and justify both his keep and their ticket price. Our “would-be” star lacked only one thing --- the belief that he could fly. The lack of that single, but critical, factor kept him from becoming the major contributor he had the potential for being.

At a particularly low point in the young elephant’s life, a well intending friend, seeing that Dumbo had both the necessary desire and ability to fly, offered him a “magic feather.” The trusted friend assured the elephant that by using the feather, he could fly. The “magic” worked. With the feather, Dumbo believed that he could fly --- so he did.

The stage had been set for Dumbo’s flying debut. He was slated to jump from a tower high above the crowd into a small tub of water. Unbeknownst to the ringmaster and his fellow performers, Dumbo was not going to make the big splash they had planned for him. Instead he was going to spread his ears and fly. He jumped. The crowd gasped as he plummeted downward. But during his fall, in his excitement, he dropped his “magic” feather.

His small friend, who, also, had taken the plunge, seeing the impending crisis for both of them, was forced to tell Dumbo the simple truth. There had never been any real “magic” in the feather at all. He always had been able to fly on his own.

... Over Please

Thank You ...

It was a defining moment for both Dumbo and his wise little friend. Telling Dumbo the truth worked. The crowd roared, not because Dumbo and his friend had crashed to the ground, but because Dumbo had recognized his own ability to fly, had spread his ears and was happily soaring above the delighted spectators. At last, Dumbo had become the star that he had always had the potential to be.

These are challenging times for businesses and the individuals that staff them. Large or small --- established or start-up --- product or service --- the pressure is on to do more, with fewer, for less and better. Like Dumbo, firms must turn more “within” to find their real means to succeed. To do that, traditional “control” management, like the “magic feather” must be dropped.

The right people don’t need “bosses” to perform any more than Dumbo really needed his “magic feather” to fly. The right people are their own bosses. They are capable of performing both the “thinking” and “doing” pieces of their work. The right people do need a manager, really more of a “coach”, who points them in the right direction, convinces them that they can “fly on their own”, supports them and helps them measure their performance. That’s it.

The key, of course, is selecting and retaining the right talent. Selecting people who are both capable of and want to do their own “flying.” Keeping them by increasing their challenges and rewarding them in direct proportion to the results they contribute. Organizational leanness, effectiveness and profitability will follow. Doing it takes a “leap of faith”, but the rewards for the organization and the individuals that support it will well outweigh the risks.

If your business or department has a challenge, share both the opportunity and the responsibility for meeting it with your people. They’ll need facts --- provide them. If they need additional resources --- provide them too. The positive results will surprise both you and them. Like Dumbo, most of us can and will “fly on our own”, if given the opportunity to do so.



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