

Upper Management: Perspective on the Maze

[BY DOUG BELLAMY,
GUEST COLUMNIST]

Problem solving can oftentimes be very similar to working your way through a maze. Those who are in the maze would greatly benefit from another perspective. This is where upper management comes in.

Upper management means more than the position of authority. It also means the position of overview. It is, in the truest sense of the word, oversight. You can immediately see the benefit of that overview and the advantage an overview would play in helping others through a maze. Those with an overview readily recognize the direction needed in order to work through the maze.

The perspective from within the maze is extremely limited. Those inside the maze just can't see the "big picture," and the big picture is exactly what they need to see, hence the need for management from above—*upper* management.

Upper management must take advantage of its unique overview by providing the needed guidance to those too

deep in the problem to see the solution. Upper management must hover above and observe, looking carefully at the struggle. As it observes and analyzes the struggle, the route to the solution often becomes apparent. Upper management must take advantage of its unique vantage point and resist the temptation to operate beneath its intended level. It must stay out of the maze and above the fray. To be truly effective, it has one role: It must manage from above.

Helping middle management see the big picture is the primary objective of upper management. Sharing the unique perspective upper management has of the particular problems currently facing middle management will help them recognize the next step toward the solution, the pathway through the maze of everyday challenges. Middle management must see the problem they are facing, and see it in a way that they will never see it alone. They must see its causes, its scope and many times be led to the solution. They must see the points at which the failure is occurring and why. They must be helped

to step back and take a good look at the whole of the problem. Next they must be shown the critical role they and their subordinates play in the solution. Then and only then will they be fully prepared to tackle the complexities of the reoccurring problems that plague their particular departments.

Whatever you do, as upper management you cannot allow yourself to get pulled into the maze or absorbed into doing your manager's job. The great temptation is to get drawn down into the maze doing tasks that are actually assigned to under-management. Though it may even seem somewhat noble, to "see to it that things get done right" by doing them yourself or by having an "I'll do it myself" attitude, never forget the fact that while you're doing their job, nobody is doing yours.

This job of upper-management is much too important to be left undone. If you bear the title of upper-management, make sure that's what you're doing. Study your company or department. Watch it work. Listen carefully to the complaints of both the customers and the employees. Analyze the problems and help those you oversee to get through the maze. Help them see the issues and solve the problems. That's your job. You're not management, you're upper management.

Doug Bellamy is president of Innovative Drywall Systems Inc. DBA Alta Drywall, Carlsbad, Calif. His company is also a winner of this year's AWCI Excellence in Construction Safety Award; read more about it on page 46.

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