

ADDRESSING A PROBLEM OF EMPLOYEE MORALE

(Executive Leadership)

BY: Everett Ward
Wrightsville Beach Fire Department
Wrightsville Beach, NC

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ABSTRACT

After two hurricane disasters a morale problem existed among the employees of the Town of Wrightsville Beach. The problem extended across departmental lines and included the fire department. It was determined that stress symptoms extended beyond those associated with the two disasters and were dormant in the workforce prior to and after the disaster events.

The purpose of this research was to identify stress factors within the employee ranks, review select concepts of leadership and associated subjects, and make recommendations to alleviate the impact of stress factors in the workforce. An action research methodology was utilized.

Research questions that were answered were: 1. What is wrong? 2. What does literature offer to address the problem? 3. What action can be taken? 4. What is the expected outcome? Procedures included employee stress assessments and evaluations. An action plan to improve the workplace environment for the town body was derived following the initiation of a key mission statement. The fire department created its own action plan including a series of employee group sessions identifying specific factors of communication, trust, respect, and teamwork. An in-house correspondence study on leadership was initiated. Surveys were taken to measure success rates. Literature was reviewed that was central to the identified issues. Expected outcomes relative to the survey, observations, and action plans were evaluated and recorded. The result of the research indicated that efforts both town-wide and in the fire department were effecting a positive change to improve the workplace environment. Recommendations call for continuation of the action plans and further evaluation. Leadership training that will include concepts of followership and its meaning to the organization is also needed.

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INTRODUCTION

An assessment of employee stress levels related to two hurricane emergencies in 1996 indicated stress levels greater than expected. A problem exists from dormant stress levels within the departments of the Town of Wrightsville Beach that are not isolated to the disasters. They are part of a series of stress factors that have occurred over time. Employees who were not part of the workforce during either hurricane also exhibited stress levels. The stress levels of Wrightsville Beach employees are notably higher than normal for public sector employees.

Stress levels vary from department to department in depth and duration and cross departmental lines. Because this problem includes the fire department and because it is indicative of dormant stress within the management of the fire department, it is considered a problem regardless of the characteristics of stresses in other departments.

The purpose of this research project is to identify stress factors within the employee ranks, review selected concepts of leadership and associated elements, and make recommendations to alleviate the impact of stress factors in the workforce. The research questions were: 1. What is wrong? 2. What does literature offer to address the problem? 3. What action can be taken? 4. What is the expected outcome?

The action method of research was utilized for the project. Research consisted of review of FEMA workshop reports based on employee reactions to disaster, review of counseling reports dealing with the stress levels of town employees, a literature review of topics related to leadership and management, and a survey of fire department employees.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Wrightsville Beach is a coastal resort community situated in southeastern North Carolina. By census, its year round population is given as 3,196 persons (Tillman, 1998). Seasonal

population is estimated to be in excess of 35,000 (Harbeck, 1994). The town is served by five departments staffed by 78 employees with a breakdown as follows: Public Works--28; Police--28; Fire--11 career employees, five interns (college students), and 10 volunteer firefighters; Administration--6, and Parks and Recreation--5. There is a manager/council form of government.

The background of this research project began with two hurricanes in 1996, Bertha in July and Fran in September. Intense demands were exerted on each department to deal with these emergencies which produced disruption of services and destruction of facilities.

Recovery operations were driven at an accelerated pace to restore public services and by January 1997 the town had resumed normal functions for all services. However, these functions resumed under abnormal conditions. The added volume of recovery work needed to restore the infrastructure exceeded normal workloads. Nevertheless, operations of the town resumed a routine mode while maintaining an accelerated pace to complete the job of recovery.

In February 1998 management coordinated an effort via New Hanover County Emergency Management to conduct a FEMA pilot workshop program entitled, "When Your Job Is a Disaster." The purpose of this three-day event was to train town workers on aspects of hurricane emergencies with respect to normal job functions.

While not the intent of the workshop, discussions in the FEMA sessions indicated a serious problem with employees on issues of morale. While the stress element of the two hurricanes was a subject, there was an upsurge of employee frustration dealing with matters of information flow, confusing expectations, and inconcise decisions within the leadership of the various departments. There were also complaints about management and leadership styles. Because of these unexpected findings, FEMA education specialists recommended that briefings for all employees continue with a specific goal of providing employees the opportunity to express concerns and

relate experiences, not only with the hurricanes but also with their job functions. If the problem was not addressed, future problems of high employee turnover, high rate of physical illness, emotional upset, family disruption, and burnout would likely occur.

In June 1998 Catholic Social Ministries (CSM) evaluated employees for disaster stress reactions. The results of this evaluation provide the basis for this paper. After several sessions with employee groups, a high level of stress was identified in the employees. Further, these stress factors were evident in all sectors of the personnel forces including employees not present in either hurricane operation but hired in the post hurricane environment. In effect, the hurricane experiences had brought attention to a serious problem that had been in place prior to the disasters. Post disaster activity had revealed these dormant issues.

The National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer Program Course, "Executive Leadership," provides topics relative to issues affecting Wrightsville Beach employee morale. These include management processes, leadership functions, and accessing organizational culture change. This course relates to other concepts of leadership issues including followership, communication, and team building. The two disasters provide an opportunity to exercise principles outlined in "Executive Leadership." They also present examples of potential management issues that can occur if managers are not attentive to employee morale in post disaster activity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this review is to provide information from which to develop a solution to the research problem. There are three content areas: substantiation of the problem of employee morale, collaboration of leadership and management, and applications to solve the problem.

Substantiation--What is wrong?

Reporting from the FEMA workshop, “When Your Job is a Disaster,” FEMA Education Specialist B. W. Zaidel (personal communication, March 5, 1998) notes frustration in various aspects of the emergency operations. Dissatisfaction was expressed with how supervisors and managers conveyed information. Often, information was not communicated. Front line workers were not able to answer questions from the public on various aspects of the operations. The public interpreted this as employees exhibiting bureaucratic and uncaring attitudes with the result of front line workers being subjected to the wrath of an agitated population.

B. W. Zaidel reports that unclear, confusing expectations of employee roles and responsibilities caused unrealistic expectations to develop. All portions of the emergency plan had not been communicated to key workers. As a result, the rationale for decisions, messages, disseminated information, and policies was difficult to understand. Workers were left to make decisions based on their own interpretations of what was understood. Often, such interpretations conflicted with other information that was being circulated.

Catholic Social Ministries Counselor D. L. Piszczek (personal communication, June 16, 1998) relates:

It became apparent early in our work that the stress levels were not related to the disaster but rather to a series of stresses that have occurred over a longer period of time The same stressors and experiences were evident throughout all departments of town government and appear to affect even those employees who were not present during the disasters. (p. 1)

Piszczek notes that overall stresses exceeded expected levels for public sector workers and created a high risk for illness, emotional upsets, domestic problems, and burnout. Stress

symptoms observed included anger, anxiety, hopelessness, feelings of isolation, family problems, high turnover, and high absenteeism.

Complaints were registered with management styles, lack of appreciation, disrespect, frequent questioning of competence, and a sense of isolation from each other and the governing body. Piszczek notes, “The chasm between management and staff continues to be one of ‘us’ and ‘them’ in which there seems to be little trust and in which information is used as power” (p. 2).

Piszczek also identified other contributing factors:

Employees have few outlets for the expression of their stress. Policies or practices that discourage contact between departments and town members limit communication with other employees. There are few outlets to express stress issues. Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services . . . appear to be underutilized due to the feeling of general distrust between employees and management regarding confidentiality. The lack of mutual respect and communication, a distrusting relationship with management, and a general hopelessness that their concerns and suggestions will be taken seriously only serve to exacerbate the stress employees feel. When stress is addressed to management, employees . . . experience a general disregard for their concerns. (p. 2)

Collaboration of Leadership and Management—What does literature offer to address the problem?

Management and leadership are often used as synonymous terms according to Coleman (1995), although they actually connote entirely different concepts. Coleman maintains that management is concerned with finance, structure, staffing, direction, mission and effectiveness. The manager “. . . is focused on the organization’s behavior of being consistent, with form and function, working to support the workforce in achieving the organization’s mission and its goals

and objectives” (p. 5).

Coleman cites leadership as, “. . . taking an organization from where it is now to where it has to be sometime in the future . . . Leadership is providing a direction . . . that drives the organization in a specific direction” (p. 5).

Not everyone is gifted with both leadership and strong manager skills. Successful executives strive to improve their skill levels and remain aware of their own weaknesses. They maximize their strengths and eliminate weakness and vulnerability by finding others to satisfy needs. Coleman emphasizes this importance, “If a person exhibits a tendency to use the same behaviors to solve all of the organization’s problems and prefers one type of behavior over another, there is a very good possibility that the response will be unsatisfactory” (p. 15).

On the subject of management, leadership, and employee effectiveness, Goldbach (1995) observes:

Officers . . . should stimulate people to perform at their optimal . . . effectiveness. It follows then that people who are happy with the work they produce are happy with themselves . . . A happy self-motivated employee should be a department’s greatest and most sought after asset. (p. 218)

Emphasizing the concept of self-actualization, Goldbach observes, “People have a need to . . . maximize their potential and accomplish something that is meaningful to them. Simply stated, self-actualization is the realization of a person’s hope and expectations” (p. 217).

In contemporary times, there are at least nine characteristics of good leadership. In comparing past leadership to modern traits, Goldbach notices:

In the past, the leader’s job was just to direct, control, supervise, . . . set goals, sit back and evaluate, judge and criticize . . . Today’s . . . leaders must be willing to work hard and

commit much more of their personal time to the task of leading. Today's fire service leaders must be willing to be cheerleaders, to encourage, support, facilitate, and, most importantly, listen and be a role model. (p. 224)

In the face of some 3,000 studies made in the last 70 years on leadership styles, Goldbach advises:

Leadership is both a science and an art. Leadership is a science because it is a learnable, teachable body of knowledge. Leadership is an art because this body of knowledge has to be applied to 'real life' with skill and deftness. This can be accomplished only through diligent study and application by trial and error, until the leader develops a style that fits the situation, the subordinate, and himself. (p. 229)

Goldbach explains that the ability to lead is based on task situations and the degree to which leadership style, approach, and personality fit the group. Quoting from the contingency approach to leadership theory by F. E. Fiedler, Goldbach writes, ". . . 'if we wish to increase organizational and group effectiveness we must not only train leaders more effectively but also teach them how to build an organizational environment in which the leader can perform well' " (p. 227). This environment features unity of command, span of control, and delegation. "Simply stated, unity of command means an individual should be responsible to one supervisor. Every member knows to whom he reports and who reports to him" (Goldbach, p. 232). Span of control establishes how many subordinates a supervisor can manage effectively. Delegation requires authority for individuals to carry out their responsibilities. Such authority requires parameters in which the employee is authorized to take whatever actions are necessary to carry out functions. Understanding benefits of delegating, feeling secure, and being in an environment that encourages delegation assure its success. Delegation is a forward step in achieving personal

progress. Assistance should be available when needed and the person delegated to must have the ability and time to complete the job.

Goldbach (1995) and H. N. Smith (1984) discuss communications. Goldbach maintains that being in touch with feelings, hopes, fears, and dislikes is part of communicating. Being in touch means being a good listener and being in contact with subordinates. Communications track vertically (in the chain of command), horizontally (among peers), and through the grapevine (within the informal organization). Information acquired through the informal organization is often inaccurate and can damage the morale of the organization. There should be assurances that information floating in the informal organization is reliable.

Of notable importance is Goldbach's discussion of the informal organization. It may be a group of employees who share common goals, likes, dislikes, and interests. It needs to be identified and there must be an understanding of how it operates and its relationship to the organization. This way, potential disagreement can be identified and brought out in the open.

H. N. Smith (1984) maintains that leaders should differentiate between the term "communication" and what effective communication really is. A communication is not an action within itself but rather a process of actions that involves sending a message by some medium. Effective communication is, "Behavior that transmits a meaning (message) from one person (sender) to another (receiver) so that it is mutually understood. Mutually understood means that both the receiver and the sender understand the message" (H. N. Smith, pp. 51–53).

H. N. Smith notes that intonations, inflections, actions, settings, behaviors, space-settings, and personal appearances affect nonverbal or verbal communications. Paralanguage, how something is said such as tone of voice, pitch, emphasis, speed, loudness, etc., is one example. Body language, symbols, and perceptions are other key examples of non-verbal communication

actions. Perceptions affect communications because they are based on individual interpretations, which in turn are influenced by prejudices. Noise also affects communications. It may be external such as loud distractions or internal such as being preoccupied with other matters.

Effective communication requires feedback that must be solicited. When it is requested, it is likely to be given. “The kind of feedback your employees give will be influenced by how willing you seem to accept it” (H. N. Smith, p. 61).

Good listening promotes feedback. H. N. Smith explains this means giving undivided attention, concentrating on what is being communicated, and listening to the feelings of others. Supervisors need to utilize formal, downward lines of communication in the process of keeping employees informed. Workers will thus learn about decisions being made and what changes to anticipate. H. N. Smith notes:

One of the primary concerns expressed by workers is that no one listens to their problems or does anything about them. Employees’ problems can be resolved only if management addresses them. However, management (or the governing body) must first become aware of the problems. It is important that workers feel that their supervisor is concerned about them and is willing to express their problems for them. (p. 63)

It is wise for the supervisor to support directives from above and communicate support for such directives to the workers. Negative intonations will encourage complaints and dampen enthusiasm. “The success or failure of many management directives depends on the supervisor’s willingness to present them in a favorable light to workers” (H. N. Smith, p. 63).

Followership is part of leadership development and is part of the “Executive Development” and “Executive Leadership” classes at the National Fire Academy. Kelly (1988) describes a follower as a person a leader can delegate responsibility to because the follower’s level of

competence and authority matches the leader's level of competence and authority.

The follower is open and is not intimidated by hierarchy and organizational structure. Followers manage themselves well and are committed to the organization, to a purpose, to a principle, or to persons outside themselves. They build competence and exert maximum focus. They are courageous, honest and credible. Followers want their leaders to follow the lead of others in pursuit of goals and needs of the organization. If the effective follower suspects the leader of flagging commitment or conflicting motives, the follower may withdraw support by changing jobs or contrive to change leaders.

Kelly asserts that good followers master needed skills and follow a program of continuing education. They take on extra work and are good judges of personal strengths and weaknesses. They contribute well to teams and see co-workers as colleagues rather than competitors. They are alert for overlooked problems. They keep leaders and colleagues honest and informed and, as such, are independent critical thinkers whose knowledge and judgment can be trusted.

Ineffective followers, (Kelly, 1988) on the other hand, buy into the hierarchy and see themselves as being subservient. They vacillate between despair over their powerlessness and an attempt to manipulate leaders for their own purposes. A fear of powerlessness becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for themselves or their work units. Their resentment leads them to undermine the team's goals. Less effective followers expect training and development to come to them. They do not go to training events unless they are sent. Leaders have to give them parental care and attention.

Qualities of effective leaders differ very little from the qualities of effective followers. A stereotyped definition of a leader comes very close to describing a follower. This stereotyped definition is wrong. Kelly emphasizes, “. . . what distinguishes followers from leaders is not

intelligence or character but the roles they play . . . Effective followers and effective leaders are often the same people playing a different part at different hours of the day” (p. 146).

In applied research for the National Fire Academy, McLerren (1992) notes that followership development depends on leadership. Principles of leadership that encourage followership need to be implemented in leadership training processes. Followership should be a part of the regular evaluation process. Followers need to be empowered and encouraged by having opportunities to use their talents and abilities to the fullest extent.

Insight into the development of internal training to promote followership is given by Smith (1996) who states, “. . . learning to follow is a constant challenge that co-exists simultaneously and in parallel with knowing when to lead” (p. 205). Examples are when another individual’s skill, judgment, and experience are greater or when another individual’s growth requires more investment in developing skills and self-confidence.

Bardwick (1996) connects leadership and trust with wartime leadership experiences to peacetime conditions. What people see, hear, and experience as being true forms trust. When communication is weak or does not exist, trust is lost to confusion and cynicism. There is a decline in morale and confidence in leadership and organizational beliefs fade. To gain trust, there must be integrity. Bardwick asserts:

Having integrity . . . rests . . . on personal courage. It requires truthfulness with oneself as well as with others in terms of what is genuinely valued and what is considered important.

Behaving with integrity also means being consistent in one’s choices and actions. . . .

Leaders must have some certainty about which direction to take and which path to choose.

In turn, this requires leaders to have a clear conviction about values and steadfastness of purpose distinguishing between right and wrong, wisdom and foolishness. (p. 137)

Bardwick continues that there must be respect for one another. Everyone's input is needed. Good leaders do not consider input as demeaning. "Hearing others, like empowering others, isn't a matter of process, it is instead, a matter of respect" (p.153).

Integrity and the importance of speaking out are the subjects of Edwards' (1995) dissertation involving a young Naval Ensign, Raymond A. Spruance. Spruance demonstrated an ability to communicate ideas and recommendations despite risks to his career. Edwards maintains that integrity is lost when a subordinate disagrees with a supervisor and either says nothing or only what he believes the boss wants to hear. Subordinates need to be encouraged to tell what higher ups need to know, not what the subordinates think they want to hear.

Edwards states, "In a synergistic environment, one plus one can equal three or more" (p. 58). A diverse group sharing information can produce information greatly superior to any individual's ideas. Edwards continues, "On the other hand, in a group of subordinates who are concerned only with what the leader wants to hear, all opinions added together still will equal just one: the leader's own opinion" (p. 58).

Edwards elevates speaking out to the level of a virtue, which, like a muscle, needs exercise. Subordinates who confront superiors early in their careers will find it easier to confront higher ups as their careers advance. For those who avoid confrontation, the opposite is true. Speaking out engenders confidence in the supervisor. Spruance once stood up to an admiral's order and saved the admiral's career by preventing a ship's grounding. A willingness to speak up builds unit trust and efficiency. On the other hand, where subordinates keep quiet, described as checking their shoeshine, they may reason that the supervisor does not need to know another opinion or want to receive information. They may fear failure or beratement.

Because there is difficulty in deciding when to speak out, Edwards presents guides for the

subordinate to follow out without being disrespectful and for superiors to accept. “. . . It is well to note that each member . . . serves as both a subordinate and a senior” (p. 59). As an example, complaining about unimportant things erodes credibility; therefore, measure the urgency. Beware of premature complaining. Maintain a high level of integrity but, Edwards notes, “Integrity is not an excuse for you to impress your boss at the expense of a shipmate” (p. 59). Tell the bad news and do not deceive. Seek advice but be careful of advice from those of less experience. Edwards advises supervisors to be open to disagreement, to remember their own roots and the importance of developing subordinates. Supervisors need to know if they are overlooking something and should be open to disagreement. They should give dissent the opportunity to be stated by appointing a devil’s advocate to weigh argument against important decisions. “We all appreciate people who agree with us, but as Attila the Hun might have said, ‘A king with chieftains who always agree with him reaps the council of mediocrity’ ” (p. 59).

Spruance’s commanding officer recognized Spruance as being sharp, willing to give his opinion, and being more concerned about what the boss needed to know than what he thought the boss wanted to hear. Spruance’s integrity and candor and his superior officer’s ability to recognize their importance made both men better leaders.

Bardwick (1996) notes that leaders inspire confidence and understand that inaction may increase feelings of anxiety, powerlessness, and insecurity. When ability is doubted, confidence and effectiveness are damaged. Leaders are perceived as being able to make things better. Leaders overcome fright with confidence, vacillation with certainty, hesitation with action, weakness with strength, floundering with expertise, cowardice with courage, cynicism with optimism, and despair with a conviction that the future will be better.

Three roles of a leader identified by Covey (1996) are pathfinder, creating a vision; aligner,

ensuring that systems and processes contribute to achieving mission and vision; and empowerer, representing the true alignment of vision and mission. Covey notes:

Individual purpose and mission are commingled with the mission of the organization.

When these purposes overlap, great synergy is created. A fire is ignited within the people that unleashes their latent talent, ingenuity, and creativity to whatever is necessary and consistent with the principles agreed upon to accomplish their common values, vision, and mission . . . This is what we mean by empowerment. (p. 153)

In research on followership, McLerren (1992) discusses the origins of empowerment. It is found in individual power and ability to accomplish goals and is derived from a heightened motivational sense of personal efficacy. Empowering practices may include expressing confidence, providing opportunities to participate in decision making, providing shelter from bureaucratic constraints, setting meaningful goals, and rewarding systems that emphasize innovation and unusual performance. Empowerment features high incentive and a variety of tasks that have personal relevance. The follower needs an appropriate level of autonomy and control with low levels of routine and rules, and high advancement prospects.

Coleman (1997) recaps the subject of teamwork with a critical examination of popular concepts of what teamwork is supposed to be. Coleman contends that teamwork and teambuilding concepts are often found only at higher levels of management. At lower levels, there is little concern about these concepts. Very often, incentive programs only reward individuals in positions of supervision or higher ups in the organization. Coleman notes performance reward systems that only recognize a fraction of the workforce as being unfair and contributing nothing to teamwork.

Another mistake with popular concepts of teamwork and teambuilding is the idea that

togetherness produces results. Coleman accounts that too often, togetherness produces group think. “That occurs when everyone is so into compatibility that they reinforce gaps in their own thinking. Teams that consist of people who all think alike can suffer from a form of operative near-sightedness that creates monumental failure” (p.24).

Coleman uses examples of teambuilding and teamwork from the sports world to emphasize empathy. Coleman observes, “Good teams are made up of people who, despite differences of opinion, understand each other’s points of view, an attitude that can help them resolve issues and problems faster than any other team” (p. 24). Empathy in a team means the ability to separate fact from opinion and the ability to recognize that facts can be discovered when there is a difference of opinion. “Empathy comes . . . when people give the other person the benefit of the doubt, before doubting the benefits of what they have to offer” (p. 25).

Coleman maintains that a team begins when individuals are able to appreciate each other’s strengths. It becomes successful when team members begin to protect each other from their own weaknesses. The team focuses on team results, not on the performance of individuals. Teams are unified in the public eye and criticize themselves only in private. “When we solve a major problem through teamwork, we can earn the respect of even our staunchest adversaries. Instead of a five alarm blaze, we can all high five each other when we function as a team” (p. 25).

Applications to solve the Problem--What actions can be taken?

Blanchard and Johnson (1983) provide in *The One-Minute Manager* a singular base from which to develop an action plan. In brief, this booklet provides a story dialogue and utilizes a central character to illustrate management principles that insure high productivity in the working environment. The one-minute manager’s approach is to develop goals, praise and reprimand procedures, encouragement, truth, and enjoyment of work. Setting a tone of efficiency,

Blanchard's and Johnson's (1983) narration follows closely Goldbach's (1995) ideas on self-actualization and recommendations by D. L. Piszczek (personal communication, June 16, 1998) who advises creating a working environment that is employee friendly. This involves teamwork, mission, communication, feedback, evaluation, and an obligation of supervisors as part of their mission to assist employees in meeting their missions.

What is the expected outcome?

The expected outcome is to apply the information and desirable characteristics derived from the literature review to the working environment. This will create positive changes, greater satisfaction for the employee, and a better appreciation of individual assets of each employee.

Topics of the literature review provided insight specific to the development of a solution to the research problem. Findings in the review regarding desirable traits, characteristics, and applied knowledge serve to cancel undesirable traits.

The literature review provided sufficient information to address the problem of employee morale. In addition to commentary on leadership, the literature review dealt with trust, integrity, empowerment, delegation, teamwork, communication, listening, self actualization and followership. It included guidance to establish goals addressing specific issues.

PROCEDURES

Group assessment sessions were arranged with Catholic Social Ministries (CSM) for all employees beginning in June 1998. Attendance was mandatory. Strict confidentiality was exercised. Sessions were conducted in private at a local facility. Two professional staff members from CSM facilitated each session. All 78 employees attended three, three-hour sessions. Groups were equally mixed across departmental lines. Average attendance per session was 23 persons per group. Concurrent three-hour sessions were conducted with the management

team. This group consisted of the manager, assistant to the manager, town clerk, and the four department heads. The management team group was given the task of drawing up a mission statement directed to improving the overall-working environment of the town. Each member of the management team was introduced to principles illustrated in *The One-Minute Manager* and was given a copy of the work. The communication on the findings of the assessment sessions was distributed to all employees in July 1998.

Appropriate literature was reviewed which dealt with principles that are central to leadership and with various contributing aspects of leadership. Extensive information was found that pertained to identified problems and established goals.

In the fire department, the chief officer hosted a series of informal group sessions for each shift. The purpose was to open dialogue and identify problem areas specific to the fire department. Three shifts were involved for a total of 12 hours. A facilitator working in a part time capacity without the presence of the chief officer conducted additional informal shift sessions. A session with combined shifts followed. Information and observations were communicated from the facilitator to the chief officer to identify specific problems affecting the fire department. The facilitator had a strong background in fire service leadership, administration, interpersonal skills, and was a graduate of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program.

The fire department initiated an in-house, correspondence-type study on leadership to be coordinated by a member of the department with experience in leadership training. An army guide on basic leadership (US Army, 1990) was adopted for this purpose. A series of reading assignments and follow-up questions was featured. Emphasis was placed on developing personal mission statements for each member. Commercially sponsored leadership and

administrative education classes were made available.

On October 8, 1998, CSM counselors conducted a voluntary stress debriefing session on the effects of Hurricane Bonnie in August 1998. This feedback represented the first available measure of any change. Management team members and CSM conducted a follow-up meeting and developed an action plan for the remainder of the year.

In late October, a survey was taken of career members of the fire department to gauge the progress of CSM recommendations and internal efforts to improve the working environment of the department. Raw data was compiled and reduced to paraphrases and percentages. No attempt was made to survey the other departments or management team members.

Actions taken in the fire department followed the generic guidance of CSM and specific departmental employee concerns. Evaluations will continue and further monitoring is needed to insure that desired goals are being achieved.

- (1) **Population:** Seven members of the fire department took the survey. (There is one sick leave and two vacancies. The 11th member of the career staff is the chief officer.)
Seventy-eight town employees are counted in the total employee group. There are eight employees in the management team. Forty town employees participated in the assessment conducted on October 8, 1998.
- (2) **Instrumentation:** A ten-part questionnaire was used to determine the efficacy of the CSM recommendations and the internal initiatives of the fire department. An interview was conducted with Diane Piszczek of CSM on October 30, 1998, to measure the results from the October 8 assessment and to satisfy other questions about the process.
- (3) **Collection of data:** Fire department survey information was compiled and assimilated. Results were condensed and included as percentiles where applicable. The fire department

member return rate was 100%.

- (4) **Assumptions and limitations:** It is assumed that all elements of the plan will be followed and completed. It is assumed that the problems reported exist in equal intensity in all departments, as no specifics were cited for any particular person, department, or division of the organization. It is assumed that the fire department will be successful in implementing the CSM guides and its own specific internal recommendations. Limitations are noted in the generic characteristic of the CSM reports. Problems specific to departments, divisions, or leaders are not indicated. Limitations are noted in the small population both of the town body and the career staff of the combination fire department. The short time period involved may limit early feedback accuracy as available data on changes may not be sufficient to give an accurate measure of change in the organization as a whole.

- (5) **Definition of terms:**

Catholic Social Ministries (CSM): A resource sponsored by the Diocese of Raleigh, NC. It provides professional support services to families and counseling programs to address priorities in community needs. Offices are in Wilmington, NC.

Generic: The town employee body as a whole without specific reference to any one department or person or division of any department.

Management Team: The management group consisting of the town manager, assistant to the manager, town clerk, and the department heads (4); often referred to as “staff.”

Town: All persons involved in the process described, including employees and management groups.

RESULTS

Generic:

In addressing the research question “What is wrong?” personal communications of B. W. Zaidel (1998) and D. L. Piszczek (1998) provide adequate observations to sustain the premise that there is a leadership problem which crosses departmental lines and affects employee morale.

The question “What does literature have to offer?” is answered in discussions in the literature review of trust, integrity, empowerment, etc. Elements of the mission statement established by the management team (Appendix A) pertain to subjects covered in the review.

The question “What action can be taken?” is addressed in both the generic course of action and the specific action taken by the fire department. The development of a mission statement and establishment of a plan of action for the town and for the fire department (Appendix B) are significant. Specific goals of the mission statement that correspond to ideas and principles in *The One-Minute Manager* will be implemented.

The answer to the research question “What is the expected outcome?” is found in the early observations and surveys. D. L. Piszczek’s interview (Appendix C) included observations from the critical stress debriefing conducted in July 1998. Piszczek reported that the overall morale is improving. Piszczek draws this conclusion from the 51% of the employee body that attended the voluntary debriefing session. Overall, 85% perceived a positive change. Change is attributed to a mutual vested interest between management and employees in the outcome. Notable improvements are better communications, a feeling of job related self worth, cooperation between departments, and an overall feeling that morale issues are improving. Results indicate that efforts appear to be effective; morale has improved 60%. Piszczek accords this as a turnaround in the state of affairs considering the short length of time the program had been

implemented. The interview also showed that there is still need to improve management-employee and interdepartmental communication. Employees need to see visible signs that their suggestions are taken seriously. The October 30, 1998, interview with Piszczek also explained the importance of choosing *The One-Minute Manager* as a guide. It is simple. It provides a guide to maintaining employee morale in general. It provides an effective technique of using time efficiently. It has been used successfully in other studies. It is easily understood by a variety of people.

The Fire Department:

The result of the shift sessions was the identification of specific issues such as communication, trust, teamwork, and respect between management and other employees and within the membership itself. In addition to the department's pre-existing mission statement, personal mission statements were developed.

As part of the answer to "What actions to take?" in-house correspondence leadership training is being developed. The lack of prior emphasis on such training and training in levels of leadership below that of officer training became apparent and is being addressed. It is already in place for all career members and will be implemented in future volunteer recruit training sessions.

The fire department's survey results indicated that favorable progress is being made (Appendix D).

A summary of the fire department's career personnel questionnaire responses follows:

1. **Improved outlook?** (6 responses) 100% yes. Why? Goals are better-defined (1); Communication has improved (3); there is more openness (1); Stress factors have been reduced (1).

2. **Order of priority?** (8 responses) Averages: Teamwork (3.37); Communications (3.25); Respect (3.25); Trust, (2.75); Empowerment (2.2).
3. **How comprehensive is CSM?** (7 responses): 1. Not direct; generic in nature. 2. Not sure, sees as a facilitator. 3. Not comprehensive, internal FD more specific. 4. Reasonably comprehensive, generic in nature. 5. Big help, brought problems to light. 6. Average, more of a facilitating tool. 7. Vague, generic in nature.
4. **Fire Department stance?** (7 responses): 100%, yes. 1. More challenges and tools provided to accomplish them. 2. Better focused on teamwork and communications. 3. More openness. 4. More communication and sincerity. 5. Evident changes. 6. Empowerment. 7. More openness.
5. **Sincerity of effort?** (7 responses): 100%, yes.
6. **Personal needs for work environment?** (5 responses): 1. More respect. 2. More cooperation. 3. More sincerity to problems. 4. Means to excel and discuss short falls. 5. Apparent communication and respect.
7. **Departmental purpose and direction?** (6 responses): 1. No. Already aware of purpose. 2. No. Purpose and direction clear to begin with. 3. Some. Needs more focus. 4. Yes. Mission clearly defined. 5. Yes. Direction is clearer; there is more emphasis on mission. 6. Yes. More teamwork.
8. **Most important item to improve working environment?** (7 responses): Communications (5); Communications and listening (1); Trust and maturity (1).
9. **Expectations?** (7 responses): 1. Better cooperation. 2. More pleasant working environment. 3. Better working environment and teamwork. 4. Less job stress. 5. Better internal relationship. 6. Continue to develop and move ahead; leave past behind. 7. Better

employer/employee relationship.

10. **Improvement?** (7 responses): The same 27%; better 73%.

Results are not complete. More evaluation and progress is needed. Internal leadership training is incomplete and has not been evaluated. Responses are essentially positive and parallel the 85% observation cited by Piszczek in the October 30th interview. Unexpected findings are found in the literature review such as the informal organization, the informal communication, and the ineffective follower. Possible links between these can imply that any combination of these elements can exacerbate existing problems. In the quest for information on leadership and management, it becomes apparent that more information on the informal organization, informal communication, and characteristics of the ineffective follower would be of interest.

Another unexpected discovery from Coleman (1997) is that teamwork can often be isolated to top management and the field worker is excluded from any teambuilding or teamwork concepts. This discovery deserves scrutiny in any organization to determine if teamwork includes everyone. Results of this research are the discovery of the problem and the implementation of the action plans. The direction taken will be to connect specific goals to principles illustrated in *The One-Minute Manager*. The expected outcome is a workplace that fulfills the mission statement.

DISCUSSION

Results present a case study in the form of a discovered problem, study of the problem and related issues, and the development of two action plans to solve the problem. The expected outcome is a friendlier working environment. In this development, generic (town) and specific (fire department) aspects of the problem had to be addressed. In the fire department, issues

centered on trust, communications, teamwork, and respect. The objective was to implement desirable features contained in the literature review. Identified symptoms and causal factors asserted by personal communications by Zaidel (1998) and Piszczek (1998) provide the missing elements--the "bad." The literature review provides the replacements--the "good."

As an example, Coleman (1995) discusses the balance of leadership and management. If the two functions are out of balance as Coleman describes, there is trouble. Coleman's (1997) *Fire Chief* article on teamwork and group think is another example of how the teamwork may not relate to all members of an organization. If characteristics of good teamwork are absent in the teamwork picture, fragmentation prevails.

Communication is another example. According to H. N. Smith (1984) a major concern of employees is that management does not pay attention to their concerns. There is no feedback, and, therefore, communication is incomplete. Edwards (1996) illustrates further by explaining the importance of feedback, which he calls "speaking up." McLerren's (1992) and Kelly's (1988) discussions on leadership and followership and the significance of knowing when to lead and when to follow parallel Coleman (1995) on the balance of management and leadership. Knowing when to lead and when to follow and getting out into the field is part of what Smith (1996) calls gaining in "sweat equity."

The culture of the informal organization and informal lines of communication are discussed by Goldbach (1995). If management is not up to date on what is happening in the informal organization, it may be surprised by dormant problems. Aspects of Kelly's (1988) ineffective follower can be associated with the adverse effects of information circulated in the informal organization. The informal organization and its lines of communication as described by Goldbach (1995) and the ineffective follower described by Smith (1996) warrant attention.

Negative intonations of supervisors as recognized by H. N. Smith (1984) can worsen adverse communications in the informal organization and undermine organizational goals.

The literature review linked one finding to the other and formed a pattern by which weak links of the leadership chain can be strengthened. An example of such linkage is found in Covey (1996), on empowering, McLerren (1992) on followership, and Bardwick (1996) on leadership, empowering, and integrity. Through the literature review, bad elements can be identified and replaced by good elements. The anticipated outcome will follow the objectives outlined in *The One-Minute Manager*, a better working environment for the employee.

The survey results and Piszczek's observations (interview, October 30, 1998) of the employee body both indicate good change is occurring. Piszczek notes that 85% of the employees indicated a 60% improvement rate in overall morale. In the fire department, the tone of responses was positive with a 100% expected positive outcome result. A subtle implication is the connotation of a perceived problem for each positive response given. Implications are that improvement has begun and needs to continue. The most positive implication is that the town and the fire department are on the right track and are doing the right things to solve the problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research results indicate progress is taking place. Evaluations scheduled in the action plans will measure success and identify weak areas. It is recommended that these evaluations continue. There is still a need to strengthen communications between management and the employees, between departments, and between management groups. Employees need assurance that their concerns are being taken seriously. Completion of this goal and its institutionalization will be a preventive measure as well as a solution to problems that do occur.

Periodic evaluation of the balance between management and leadership in the management

groups is needed. The result would be early identification of imbalance and the implementation of appropriate actions to acquire equilibrium.

Continuing leadership training is needed for supervisory and management group professional development. The result will be a uniform appreciation and application of leadership skills that will prevent a repetition of the problem.

Assessments are needed to ascertain the attitudes of management group members and the support they give to the importance of developing leadership. The result will be that negative intonations can be identified and alignments can be made.

A stronger effort is needed to improve communications in departments, across departmental lines, and within management groups. The result will be openness and trust between divisions and a better environment for teamwork.

Periodic review of the mission statement is needed. The result will assure that everyone is working together toward a common purpose.

Each employee needs a personal mission statement. The employee must understand that it is the job of management to assist the employee in meeting his personal goals and objectives. The result will be that all goals and objectives will be clearly understood and the employee will have a clear direction of purpose.

Sincerity needs to be preserved. The result will be a better sense of belonging and trust.

A full commitment to leadership principles is needed. As a result, employee empowerment will meet the expected outcome of the mission statement. This should be a part of employee evaluation so that strengths and weaknesses in the employee's leadership or leadership potential can be identified.

Future readers should be aware of the over 7,000 different leadership studies made in the

last 70 years (Goldbach, 1995). Applications of leadership principles such as Blanchard and Johnson and the writings of Coleman, Kelly, McLerren, Edwards and others are recommended as practical guides to identifying specific leadership traits and characteristics. As practical guides, they are easily applied to the real world.

The final product in the development of leadership is improved employee morale. As each author cited in the literature review has indicated, all elements are relative to the whole picture. When any element is missing, there can be failure or negative reaction such as a decrease in morale. A wise leader will be aware of all levels of his organization in his efforts to improve employee morale.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Management Team Mission Statement

The mission of management is to empower town employees to provide high quality effective services to the residents and visitors of Wrightsville Beach.

PRINCIPLES

1. Focus on mission—empower staff to accomplish commonly accepted outcomes.
2. Employees are the greatest asset and resource. Each person has unique talents and skills.
3. Relationship is based on trust and trustworthiness.
4. Treat all with dignity and respect even when they fail.
5. Enable decisions to be made at the “lowest” possible level.

What can we do together to do our job well? How do we get there?

Listening to all

Mission

Consensus

Forgiveness

Trust of each other

Sense of humor

Putting self in others' shoes

Acceptance of failings

Leading/following

Cooperation

Honesty

Appendix B: Generic Action Plans for the Town and the Fire Department

I. Generic Action Plan for the Town

1. Recognize problems; foster feeling of openness toward all employees; give continued attention to any factors of dissatisfaction.
2. Formulate a mission statement by the management team.
3. Provide employee and management training: Two-hour sessions for two months with management and middle management.
4. Continue to meet with employees after three months to solicit their input.
5. Utilize key elements of the mission statement for management and middle management, including teambuilding and conflict resolution.
6. Implement principles outlined in *The One-Minute Manager*.
7. Provide periodic progress evaluations.

II. Fire Department Action Plan

1. Develop internal efforts that are coordinated with the generic action plan.
2. Schedule group sessions and one-on-one sessions, pre-evaluation and final evaluation interviews.
3. Continue the in-house correspondence study on leadership.
4. Encourage attendance in leadership, management, and administrative classes.

Appendix C: Interview Questions from Diane Piszczek, Catholic Social Ministries, Wilmington, NC, October 30, 1998:

1. Based on CSM observations, what changes caused the rise in morale of employees?
2. How many people were represented in the assessment process in the Hurricane Bonnie debriefing?
 - a. How many of these were positive in their response?
 - b. Based on the hurricane Bonnie attendance, how much has morale improved since the CSM began its work?
3. What factors were noted as improvements or needing improvement in the Bonnie debriefing?
4. What factors were involved in the selection of *The One-Minute Manager* for the management group?

Appendix D: Survey Questions for the Fire Department

Assessment of Catholic Social Ministries' effectiveness in improving the workplace environment. For the Wrightsville Beach Fire Department Career Staff.

Please restrict your responses to the fire department. Please answer the questions below. This process is part of research being conducted for the National Fire Academy's Executive Officer Program.

1. Since Catholic Social Ministries began its work, has your outlook in the job environment improved? a. Yes (). Why? b. No. (). Why?
2. Place a number between one and five in the order of importance to the following subjects that have been addressed (Five is the highest, one is the lowest.):

Communications____Trust____Respect____Empowerment____Teamwork____
3. How comprehensive do you think the Catholic Social Ministries is in guiding the fire department? Why?
4. Is the fire department taking proper action to resolve the current issues? Why?
5. Do you think there is a sincere effort to address the problems brought to light?
6. How are your needs being addressed to insure a friendly working environment?
7. Is the department's purpose and direction more clearly defined? Yes____How?
No____Why?
8. What has been the most important item to improve the working environment? Why?
9. What do you expect from the process?
10. How do you assess the following:

a. Communication	()	About the Same	()	Better	()	Worse
b. Trust	()		()		()	
c. Teamwork	()		()		()	
d. Feedback	()		()		()	
e. Listening	()		()		()	
f. Cooperation	()		()		()	
g. Leading/following	()		()		()	
h. Mission	()		()		()	
i. Empathy	()		()		()	
j. Trustworthiness	()		()		()	