

Employees as Leaders

HELLO AGAIN! Last week you learned about the difference between the “Great Man Theory” and “Trait Theory.” It is now time to understand “Behavioral Theory” or “Behaviorism” for administrative leaders to teach employees to be successful leaders.

BEHAVIORAL THEORY OR BEHAVIORISM describes an administrator leader’s performance standards/expectations of an employee’s employment behaviors. These behaviors are in addition to considering an *employee’s traits as presented last week—as part of the “Great Man Theory” and “Trait Theory.”* The “Behavioral Theory” says that everyone can be a great leader—however, the employee needs to learn how to behave by effective leadership conditioning from the administrative leader.

There are two forms of employee leadership Behavioral Therapy or Behaviorism: Operant Conditioning and Classical Conditioning. This short article deals with Operant Conditioning only.

- Operant Conditioning: Operant conditioning is when an employee learns expected behaviors as an outcome of experiencing *consequences* to their good or bad employment behaviors. Expected behaviors are indicated by the administrator leaders’ Performance Standards—previously known as a Job Description, which has less specific quality statements of required compliance. The employee’s behavior is modified and reinforced through rewards for compliance to Performance Standards and punished for non-compliance to Performance Standards. Pleasant consequences to Performance Standards related to an employee’s work are more likely to be repeated by the employee, and unpleasant consequences to Performance Standards related to an employee’s work are more likely to be stopped by the employee. The outcome is that employees usually *re-train their minds* to repeat desired behaviors because of pleasant consequences when meeting Performance Standards. When an employee’s job compliance occurs to meet the Performance Standards, acceptable employee learning has occurred.

Yale University claims there are two types of positive employee reinforcement of work behaviors:

- Process Reward—e.g., “How wonderful you remembered every single step to get it right.”
- Terminal Reward—e.g., “Great! You did the whole thing right!”

Process Reward requires an administrative leader’s attention to incremental, frequent, and positive reinforcement regarding an employee’s success in meeting Performance Standards. This systematic and recurring reward process produces greater and faster compliance to Performance Standards than just a final Terminal Reward.

Behavioral Theory/Behaviorism requires the employer/administrator to devote extensive teaching and reinforcement of the employee’s job Performance Standards. This single approach is probably more expensive, time-consuming, and risky without considering leadership traits (as mentioned last week). Sometimes, this on-the-job-behavioral training related to Performance Standards results in questionable success. Psychology provides a solemn reminder that people will usually continue to do what has historically worked for them. Therefore, there is a need for reminders, monitoring, and correcting non-compliance to Performance Standards. Sometimes, learning to be an effective employee leader can take more time than desired to be functionally effective.

If you choose the Behavioral Theory approach in teaching employees leadership concepts/abilities, be gentle with the employee seeking to learn intricate details of their Performance Standards. This approach takes time and patience for an employee to know what is usually considered to be learning the “hard way.” Always be aware of the possible need to update the Performance Standards to be as current and clear as possible. Success means available help and frequent monitoring is necessary, especially during the learning phase.

Always perform a balancing act of toughness and calmness to assist employees in becoming effective leaders. On the gentler side--be fair, understanding, and kindly objective with good administrative resilience.

Next week: How to write Performance Standards

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