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Managing Your Employees

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Women are increasingly ascending to management roles. They may easily be mistakenly tempted to treat their subordinates like family, one management advisor maintains. Readers of *asiancemagazine.com* might succumb to this if they adopt traditional, non-confrontational approaches that are often very effective outside the commercial realm. **Allowing others to “save face” by soft-pedaling criticism of them causes problems.**

Which management philosophy is most like yours? 1. Keep your employees under your thumb. 2. Require strict adherence to your rules. 3. Teach them, and offer them direction. 4. They are adults: let them just do their jobs.

In mid-September, the head of Capacity Consulting, Inc., Eric Egeland, presented a compelling seminar in which he justified some surprising advice. For example, **as nice as teaching and trusting sound, requiring strict adherence works better, as long as the rules are clear, sensible, and consistent.**

Egeland is familiar with the personnel management literature, but also has extensive experience as an “undercover employee,” through multi-month gigs as “one of the team,” watching what it is that employees do when the boss is unaware. “When the cat’s away, the mice will play” is often true on the job. Egeland gave three disappointing, real-life examples, one being the sabotage of the sales performance of new hires by the “old-timers.”

Much that is important to business goes beyond the job description. Managers go wrong when they focus simply on the performance of specified tasks, rather than on the broader issue of behavior.

Humans tend to avoid conflict, but this can cause a manager to soft-pedal a criticism that needs to be made strongly. **Treating employees “like family”** is often unappreciated and can backfire, as any criticism comes as a surprise, is taken personally and is resented.

We like to believe in the goodness of our fellow humans, but perhaps one in ten will disappoint us greatly, so we cannot count on their virtue. To be fair to all, we must be consistent in enforcing our rules, diligently but not militantly. **A lack of enforcement favors those who break the rules over those who obey them.**

When his talk was over, I congratulated Egeland on his excellent presentation, and I told him how **I had lost one of my own best employees by not following a couple of his precepts. I had treated her too much like family, and I had been reluctant to express any criticism when she performed below expectations.**

Some readers will find themselves managing their family members. How to do that? Very carefully!

A fuller presentation is available in Eric Egeland’s new book, ***EMPLOYEES, KIDS, AND PETS: How to Get Out of Your Own Way and Be a Better Boss, Manager and Parent,*** available though *amazon.com*.

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