

Working Relationships

That Work

Getting results through communication, accountability, and trust



SNAPSHOT

The E-Myth Mastery Program

Module 4: Foundations of E-Myth Management

Business Development Process: MG-0060

“Few things help an individual more than to place responsibility upon him, and to let him know you trust him.”

– Booker T. Washington, educator

Overview

Your business must be “a game worth playing.” An enterprise with a *purpose* that people will want to commit themselves to, passionately and wholeheartedly. Employees want to work for a company that has a game worth playing. Customers want to do business with a company that has a game worth playing. Communities want to support a company that has a game worth playing.

As you build your game worth playing, you’ll be creating “rules for your game” also. The rules help everyone move in the same direction, toward the common goal. The Principles of Working Relationships presented in this process are an initial set of rules for your game that will help people work together harmoniously and avoid many common misunderstandings and frustrations.

Principles of Working Relationships

Management by Agreement and Management by Exception

These principles establish that people will rely on each other to work according to agreed upon systems, standards, and time frames, and will notify each other early on when exceptions occur.

Guidelines for Working Interactions

This principle defines a set of rules for how people interact with one another, based on their organizational relationship, and fosters better communication and more trust among employees.

Guidelines for Effective Delegation

Since “well begun is well done,” this principle provides a set of rules that help ensure work is begun in the best possible way, with a clear delegation of the result needed and any other key information.

Guidelines for Effective Regulation

How do you help people get the right result without smothering them or leaving them “in the lurch”? This principle gives you a set of rules for guiding people in a productive and respectful way.



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Benchmarks for Implementing Principles of Working Relationships

Conduct a baseline evaluation of current working relationships in your company

Adapt the forms, handouts, and policies to your business

Create a plan to train staff and implement Principles of Working Relationships

Conduct training; implement the Principles of Working Relationships

Working Relationships That Work

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What Makes Working Relationships Work?

If there is more than one person working in your business, you’ve probably seen the effects of working relationships that *don’t* work. Even the most cordial, pleasant, and diligent employees occasionally become annoyed, frustrated, or angry with their coworkers.

Working relationships that *do* work are characterized by open and respectful communication, accountability, and trust. These three characteristics go hand in hand; it’s very difficult to have any one of them without the other two.

Think about it. How can you trust someone who can’t or won’t be accountable for what they commit to? And how can you be accountable for getting a result if you’re not getting all the information that impacts the work you’re doing?

Many business owners, managers, and perhaps even you, think there’s not much you can do to improve the quality of communication, accountability, or trust in an organization. People either possess these qualities, or they don’t. After all, you can’t make someone be a better communicator, more accountable, more trustworthy or more trusting, can you?

Yes, you can.

While it may be true that you can’t *force* someone to be better at these things, you can create an environment where these qualities are valued and where systems are in place to promote and help cultivate them. This can be accomplished by including a set of principles for the way people work together, right in your company’s “rules of the game.”

This process will discuss these fundamental Principles of Working Relationships. They’re simple, straightforward, and easy to implement. And yet, their influence on your business can be profound. Once you understand, implement, and integrate them into the way you do business every day, you’ll find that people throughout your organization will be working together more cooperatively and harmoniously than ever before. Then they can put their energy and attention on getting results for your business and on their own achievement, rather than on “people problems.”

Why “Rules for Your Game?”

According to The E-Myth Point of View, your business needs to be “a game worth playing,” not only for you, but for employees, customers, and anyone else who comes into contact with it. What is a game worth playing? It’s any endeavor that has *meaning* for people, that leads people to transcend the minor details of the moment for a higher purpose. People need to have a connection to a higher purpose. It’s essential – and it’s the thing most people will tell you is missing from their lives.

Every game needs a set of rules. (Can you think of any game that doesn’t have rules?) And the best games have the best rules.

Have you ever been to another country where driving laws were different than the ones you’re used to, like driving on the left side of the road versus the right, or allowing turns on a red signal versus not allowing turns? Do you remember how difficult it was the first time you encountered that, not being sure where you were, when to go or not go, or if you could turn? Do you remember how upset or angry you felt when someone honked his horn at you (or worse), simply because you were confused? Do you get angry at others who don’t seem to know or follow the accepted “rules of the road?”

It’s a plain fact, people in any environment work better together and get more joy and satisfaction when there are known and agreed upon guidelines for behavior – in other words, rules of the game – and when people follow them wholeheartedly and with a positive spirit. It’s even more satisfying when it is agreed that, under certain circumstances, a rule can be broken. This gives people a sense of freedom and control and the permission to make a reasoned decision when the situation doesn’t quite fit the rule book (like speeding to get someone to the hospital in an emergency).

Likewise, keep in mind that, from time to time, the principles in this process may be “broken” or temporarily set aside, if the situation warrants it. Understand that setting aside a rule, under the right circumstances, is a demonstration of responsibility and personal freedom. It means that your business has a place for conscientious and independent thinking that acknowledge unique situations, in addition to the ground rules that support healthy working relationships.

Creating a game worth playing, with rules that serve both your business and your people, is at the heart of building a business that works.

Defining the Principles of Working Relationships

The Principles of Working Relationships are the framework within which managers and employees relate to each other on the job. Without these basic principles, people can be confused about what they should and shouldn't do and what they should and shouldn't expect others to do. With them, people operate with an underlying sense of certainty in themselves and others and your company emanates a sense of order to everyone who comes in contact with you.

There are five basic principles of working relationships:

Principle 1: Management by Agreement

Managers and employees agree to produce results together. Employees agree to take on their accountabilities and to do the work according to existing systems and agreed upon standards. Managers agree to provide their employees with the training, resources and support they need.

Principle 2: Management by Exception

Once a system is in place or the manager and employee have agreed upon a course of action, the employee is accountable for identifying and reporting whenever something significant occurs that isn't part of the plan. Then adjustments can be made to get the right result.

Principle 3: Guidelines for Working Interactions

In organizations there are only two kinds of relationships: manager – reporting employee relationships and employee – employee relationships. In other words, either I report to you (you're my manager) or I don't (you're not my manager, even though you may have an equal or "higher" position). Defining working relationships this way and having clear guidelines about how people interact with one another based on their positions can significantly improve communication, accountability, and trust within your company.

Principle 4: Guidelines for Effective Delegation

In a literal sense, delegation means having someone act as your representative by turning over an accountability. You and your managers achieve your results by delegating portions of your work and results to your reporting employees. These delegations are broadly defined in their position contracts. But delegating work doesn't stop with the position contract. Managers and employees need a framework for delegating work so that

managers can trust their employees will understand what work needs to be done, and so that employees can trust they'll have all the information they need to get the work done.

Principle 5: Guidelines for Effective Regulation

Regulating work means monitoring, reviewing, and adjusting it to get the right result. Even the most effective delegation can't guarantee the best result all the time. Why not? Because no matter how hard we try or how much attention is given, communication between people is imperfect. What I think I've communicated is not always what I really communicated and what I think you understood is not always what you really understood. In addition, the requirements of the project or task often change between the time the delegation is given and accepted, and the time the result is delivered. These "complications" make it absolutely vital that work be regulated. It's like a pilot who watches the instrumentation and makes course corrections to keep the airplane on track toward its intended destination.

Let's look at each of these principles in more detail.

The Basis for Accountability and Trust – Management by Agreement and Management by Exception

You can't manage anything your people don't agree to do. And you can't make them do anything they choose not to do.

It's as simple as that. You can offer, you can persuade, you can bribe, you can yell, you can intimidate, and, ultimately, you can fire, but you cannot make someone do what he will not do.

This is why employees' agreement to do the work, coupled with their commitment to follow through and their willingness to be accountable, are at the heart of working relationships that really work. Your employees' demonstration of their commitment and accountability allows you to trust them; likewise, your demonstration of these qualities allows them to trust you, and a healthy and productive working relationship is born.

Does this mean that everyone is happy all the time, that people never engage in work that they would rather not do? No, of course not. Sometimes work is difficult; sometimes we have to do something that's less agreeable to us than something else. But we accept these times because they serve the bigger picture, the game worth playing. Because we see how every task, the undesirable as well as the desirable, brings the company closer

to its Strategic Objective and helps us learn, grow, and achieve our Primary Aim.

The principles of management by agreement and management by exception mean:

- The manager and employee have agreements about what work is to be done and how and when it is to be done. Often these agreements are expressed in documented business systems.
- Any changes in the work requirements are made only after mutual agreement between the manager and the employee.
- The employee takes on full accountability for performing work and achieving results as agreed, and the manager is accountable for providing the employee with the resources and guidance needed.
- Exceptions are reported immediately. The employee is accountable for notifying the manager and any other affected people in writing if the work will not be performed or the system carried out as agreed. The manager also notifies the employee if commitments made by the manager cannot be achieved.
- The manager can assume the work is being performed as agreed unless otherwise notified.
- Periodic check-ins between the employee and manager, called “reporting loops,” are the main vehicle for keeping each other informed about how work is progressing.
- Failure to notify of exceptions or missed due dates – in other words, silence – is not acceptable.
- Relationships built on trust are developed as managers and employees keep their commitments and successful results are achieved.

Management by agreement and management by exception are cornerstones of your company’s management system. They presume you want an environment based on respect and trust, not fear or intimidation.

How do you get employees’ agreement? There are a number of ways:

They sign their position contracts.

They learn and agree to follow orchestrated systems.

They sign delegation agreement forms or agree in some other written form.

They agree verbally (not the recommended way, but it's better than nothing).

The bottom line on agreement is: if they don't agree, you can't count on the result; and if you can't count on the result, you can't be free to get your own results. The development of your business can slow to a crawl.

If people are operating according to management by agreement, why do you need management by exception? Because in the real world, things change and previously unknown factors become known. Systems can't possibly account for every variation that may occur as people use the systems in their work, day in and day out. So, using management by agreement and exception, you can operate with the understanding that: a) work proceeds according to a defined system (an agreement) and b) any situation outside the bounds of the system (an exception) needs to be identified, so that you can decide whether and how the exception should be handled. Recognizing that there will be exceptions and having a system to deal with them is smart business and smart management.

People can notify managers and other affected people about exceptions to the agreement by using an exception report, some other written format, or verbally (as a last resort, but it's better than nothing). You'll find an example of an exception report form in the worksheets section of this process.

By the way, this principle also should be implemented among peers (that is, people who are not in an employee-manager relationship). If you agree to do something, you hold yourself accountable for doing it. And if for some reason you can't, let the other person know, in writing, and as soon as possible. Everyone benefits from this kind of accountability in action.

When people throughout your company use management by agreement and management by exception, more work gets accomplished and people feel better about what they're doing.

The "Peace of Mind" Principle – Guidelines for Working Interactions

Just as our conventions for "rules of the road" help us drive safely and enjoyably, guidelines in your company for how people interact with each other do pretty much the same thing. Not only do the following guidelines make good business sense, they also give people the sense of just enough "order" to help them feel secure and give them peace of mind, without feeling unduly constrained. Day-to-day relationships between people work better when they can count on each other to behave in consistent, predictable ways.

The guidelines for working interactions, then, are a set of operating procedures that establish standards for interpersonal communication at work *so that people can achieve results without conflicts or ambiguity.*

Your company's organization chart is the starting point for these working interactions. It's the "road map" of work groupings and reporting relationships in your company.

So, let's look at the six guidelines for working interactions:

1. The type of organizational relationship you're in with another person will guide your working interactions.

Let's go back to and expand upon the idea of the two kinds of relationships in your business: manager – reporting employee relationships ("line" relationships), and employee – employee relationships ("staff" relationships).

In a line relationship, the manager has the authority to communicate information about the work itself and to direct the activities of the reporting employee. In a staff relationship, neither person has this authority.

Two related guidelines follow from this understanding of line and staff relationships:

- Directives should only come from your manager. Directives are any information, requests, or delegations that would cause you to take action or change the course of your actions.
- If someone other than your manager gives you a directive that feels inappropriate or intrusive, or would cause you to be unable to meet a prior agreement, you should refer the person to your manager.

The net effect of these guidelines will be:

- Your employees will be more capable than ever of safeguarding and meeting their accountabilities, giving you better, more consistent results.
- They will plan and use their time and resources more effectively, because they know they will not be able to interrupt someone else for help at the drop of a hat.
- They will feel that their own work is truly valued, no matter what position in the company they hold.
- They will be more willing and able to make good decisions, rather than feeling compelled to comply with every request.
- Their respect for each other will grow.

2. Everyone in the company has one, and only one, primary manager.

For people to perform at their best, they must be free from frequent and conflicting information, requests, and directives. There are few things that are more frustrating to employees than being told one thing, and then being told something entirely different by someone else five minutes later. “What do I do now? Who should I listen to? Should I do this first or that first? How do I decide what to do?” The “one manager” rule, combined with the implementation of line and staff relationship principles, will both reduce the number of times employees find themselves in these types of situations and also give them a way to deal with these situations in a way that makes them feel great about themselves and their ability to control their environment.

A minor variation may arise when one person fills more than one position in your organization. Then it’s possible that a person may have more than one manager, at least on paper. For example, let’s say that your company’s financial analyst is also occupying the position of market analyst. In one position, she reports to the Manager, Financial Services and in the other position, she reports to the Manager, Marketing Development. All you need do is designate one of those managers as the *primary* manager, who would then be the one who has the principal relationship with that employee. The employee’s relationship with the other manager would focus mainly on work assignments. Issues such as employee development, salary, benefits, and overall work scheduling would be handled by the primary manager.

How do you decide which manager would be the primary manager? Usually the workload and accountabilities of the employee fall more heavily into one of the positions than the other; that manager would be the primary manager. Going back to our example, suppose your employee’s role as financial analyst takes 75% of this person’s time and attention versus 25% of her time as market analyst. It makes sense, then, for the Manager, Financial Services to be her primary manager. Sometimes the two managers have to agree between themselves who should be primary. In rare instances, you may have to decide for them.

The primary manager is in regular contact with the other manager to make sure she’s always got the full picture.

3. Owners who work in the business must assume positions on the organization chart and act according to the line and staff relationships defined by those positions.

The title of “owner,” in and of itself, doesn’t have any meaning with regard to the day-to-day running of a business. In fact, many business owners aren’t directly involved with their business’ operations.

On the other hand, many business owners do take an active role, usually as President. President is an organizational position with a very specific purpose and operational accountabilities. Sometimes owners take other positions in the company, in addition to, or instead of President.

If you’re an owner who also works in the business, you *must* have a position on the organization chart and you *must* obey the rules of your own game. If you don’t, you will get in people’s way and cause confusion, and your people may be too polite or too afraid to tell you about it. In either case, not following your own rules diminishes the effectiveness of your employees.

In your enthusiasm to run your business and get the best results possible, you may be the biggest violator of the principles of line and staff relationships. Begin watching yourself, and invite everyone in your company to tell you when you’re overstepping your bounds by “giving orders” outside of the line relationship. You will be doing yourself, your employees, and your business a favor, and moving that much closer to freeing yourself from your business.

If you are one of two or more owners working in the business, this principle takes on added importance. Since multiple business owners are often relatives or friends, they usually find themselves trying to juggle three different relationships: the business partner relationship, the co-worker relationship, and the personal relationship.

It puts a great strain on a business when these relationships overlap one another. When employees see, or even perceive, that the partners are in conflict with one another, or that they’re favoring each other at the expense of other employees, morale can plummet. Tensions rise, people feel afraid of speaking openly, and the whole business can be negatively affected.

To make matters worse, the effect of owners not adhering to line and staff relationships is insidious because it can be so automatic, the owners probably don’t realize what’s happening,

and employees may not be able to clearly identify it either. Everyone just knows that things are definitely not working!

This problem is easily correctable, although it does take commitment, vigilance, and a desire on the part of owners to change their own behavior. Simply stated: keep ownership and personal issues out of the business. Keep your organizational role always at the forefront, no matter what that role is: president, vice president, salesperson, or widget maker. Make the deliberate effort to honor the line and staff relationships associated with your positions.

Partners can take care of ownership issues in regular meetings dedicated to that purpose. Otherwise, act as if you're working for a company owned by someone else, someone wholly unconnected to you, except as your employer.

4. Everyone will respect each other's time, space, and need for concentration. Socializing will not impede anyone's work activities.

In the ideal company, a warm, friendly work environment is balanced by the employees' dedication to get the job done.

Employees have the right to uninterrupted time – time to concentrate on the accountabilities at hand. Everyone needs to be aware that even minor intrusions can disrupt the work flow and cause people to feel uneasy.

This isn't to say you should ban socializing. That would be heavy-handed, counterproductive and, frankly, impossible. Instead, encourage employees to tell others politely, but directly, when they don't want to be interrupted. "I'd like to talk with you about that later, but right now I'm in the middle of something important that I need to concentrate on. Can I call you in half an hour?"

It's important your people understand that it's not only okay, but desirable, to communicate like this to each other and equally important that they actually develop the ability to do so.

It may also help to develop a "hard" system solution to minimize interruptions. At one successful company, just such a system was created:

Each employee has a little flag on a flagpole sitting on their desks. When the flag is down, the message is: I'm free for questions, comments, brief chats. When the flag is up, it means: This is my focus time. Please don't interrupt me, except in an emergency.

And it works!

5. When a manager is absent from the workplace, temporary authority for his or her reporting employees goes to the next higher position in the “line.”

If a manager is away from work unexpectedly, it follows that no one else had been designated to “step in.” It makes life a lot simpler for everyone if it’s known where to turn when a manager is away.

Even if the manager’s absence is known in advance, this guideline still works best most of the time. If the manager wanted to ask someone else (other than his own manager next up the line) to take his place while gone, who would be the most likely candidates? A peer level manager from a “neighboring” department is one possibility, but that person might not be adequately aware of the activities and issues of the department. The other likely possibility is one of the manager’s own reporting employees – the one with the most managerial qualities. Although this approach might be used occasionally, especially for managerial skill development, it puts the employee in the position of temporarily managing his or her own peers, which could lead to some awkward situations.

In short, temporary vesting of authority to the next higher level when a manager is gone, is the simplest, most effective, and most reliable course of action the majority of the time.

If you’re the president you might ask, “What happens when I’m gone? Since there’s no one above me on the organization chart, where does my authority go?”

That’s easy, too. The life of your business goes on as usual. All your reporting managers are on their own to run their departments as you’ve trained them to do. And when you return, you’ll discover just how good a job you’ve done setting up your systems!

6. Service relationships do not supersede, conflict with, or compromise line relationships. Service systems will be developed and used to manage service relationships effectively.

A service relationship is a particular type of staff relationship. Service relationships exist throughout your business. Employees in the finance, administration, marketing, and information technology departments, just to name a few, provide service to people in other departments.

It may appear that, under the definitions of line and staff relationships, you have to go through a person’s manager to get service support. But, do you really need to ask the word

processor's manager when you want to have some correspondence prepared? Of course not. You have a system for getting these types of staff support without going through the manager each and every time. Routine directives from staff to service departments must be made in writing using some form of the delegation agreement (to be discussed later in this process booklet.)

But just because there is a service system in place doesn't mean you (or anyone) should be under the impression that you can direct that person's activities, change their priorities, or pass along substantive information without the involvement of their manager.

So, that's the list of guidelines for working interactions. Think long and hard about how these rules can facilitate not only the smooth running of your business, but the effectiveness of every work relationship. Discuss them with your managers. Announce them to your people. Continuously move them from the realm of principle and rules into company policy. "This is how we do it here. Because it works. For all of us."

Initiating the Agreement – Guidelines for Effective Delegation

Contrary to popular belief, delegation is not "dumping" work on other people. If you've ever been on the receiving end, you know "dumping" doesn't feel good. And you're also not very likely to be willing, or even able to, give that task your best effort.

So, how can you and your managers think about delegation so that it not only makes people feel valued and respected, but also produces the result you want? Think of it as part of your *management system* for getting work done through other people by creating an environment in which they *want* to do the work, and are *able* to do the work.

Think of it as a set of concrete steps for inspiring your people to commit to accountabilities that helps them succeed in their jobs. That makes them feel they're a part of something bigger. That enables them to grow as individuals and professionals.

This is certainly a more satisfying approach than the one which forces people to "run and hide" whenever they see their manager coming with "one more piece of work that he doesn't want to do himself."

Delegating doesn't mean abdicating. It means you retain the ultimate accountability for making sure the right result is achieved. For you, it means you're still in control, but without

the burden of actually doing the work. For your employee, it means there's someone there if help is needed.

There are four steps in the delegating process:

1. Identify the work or result you want to delegate, and determine to whom you'll delegate it.

You can delegate almost anything, with the following exceptions:

- You can't delegate the overall result of your position (unless you're leaving your position).
- You can't delegate the work or results of someone else's position (unless you have their agreement).
- You can't delegate work or results that have been delegated to you and that you've agreed to do yourself.

Regarding the delegation itself, first determine which position is the appropriate one for the task. Not the appropriate person, the appropriate *position*.

Unfortunately, many business owners and managers have a tendency to delegate everything to the same person or persons, over and over. These are the people who have come through for you before.

The consequences of such delegating practices? Not only are you overloading these employees with too much work or work that's not rightfully theirs, you're also sending some very strong messages to your other employees: "I really don't trust you with the work you were hired to do;" or "Our organizational structure isn't really worth much;" or "I can't rely on it to do what it's intended to do." This can lead to business problems such as people dependency, employee turnover, and lack of commitment, which all ultimately lead to higher costs to you, both financial and emotional.

What's the remedy? First, pay attention to your own habits. Notice if you're stuck in a "comfort zone" of habitually delegating to the same people. Make sure you're hiring the right people for the job. Invest managerial time in creating systems and training people in their use. And finally, force yourself to "let go" and trust people to do their jobs.

Once you've identified the right position for the task you want to delegate, if the position you've identified does not report to you, go to that person's manager or use the service system to request the result you need.

If the position does report to you and there's more than one person in the position, choose one of them based on current workload, competence, the importance of the task, time requirements, personal interests, career development, or any number of other factors that might come into play.

2. Put the delegation in writing, with the due date.

Once you know what you're going to delegate and have identified the right position and person for the task, you need to write the delegation down, with as much detail and specificity as possible.

Unnecessary? A waste of time? Not at all! When you put something in writing:

- It forces you to plan the work better.
- You're more likely to communicate what you really mean.
- Others are less likely to misinterpret what you want.
- It provides a record of the request, in case any of the parties forgets.
- It minimizes confusion, disagreement, and misunderstanding.
- It allows people to function more independently.
- People know exactly what they're agreeing to.
- You'll be more confident of getting the right result.
- It gives you a starting point for quantifying and orchestrating the work.
- It saves you time in the long run.

The absolute "musts" in your delegation are: the result you want, standards that must be met, and a due date and time. Often the employee can determine the actual work needed to produce the result, although in some cases you might choose to lay out the task yourself in a step-by-step fashion.

Don't neglect the due date and time! More headaches arise from this issue than almost anything else. As a manager, you must be crystal clear and specific about when you want the result accomplished. You can't expect your employees to be "mind readers" and give you what you want, when you want it, unless you tell them. And you certainly can't blame them for being late (although many managers try to) when they weren't given the due date right from the start.

State the due date and time specifically: Monday, July 12th by 3 p.m. Not: in a few days, in a couple of weeks, or pretty soon. And certainly not the dreaded: ASAP (as soon as possible).

Most people's reluctance to giving a specific due date stems from not being certain how long the task might take. Just use your best judgment. You'll get better and better at it as you go. On occasion, if you and your employee find that it's not realistic, a new date or time can always be agreed upon.

In the worksheets section of this process is a delegation agreement form. It's simple to use and is a complete system for delegating work, negotiating the particulars, and getting agreement. Revise it to suit your situation, if necessary, and set a date for implementing it with your employees.

3. Discuss the delegation with the employee whenever possible.

For new assignments, it's an excellent idea to discuss the delegation with your employee. Even though the delegation agreement form is designed so that a face-to-face meeting is not necessary, a meeting can give the two of you the opportunity to do a number of things:

- Discuss the overall objective of the assignment; relate it to the company's or the department's goals.
- Discuss the logic behind the due date and the standards.
- Get clarity and agreement on the relationship of this task to the employee's other work accountabilities to re-prioritize, if necessary.
- Prepare for what might be difficult or challenging for the employee.
- Provide a forum for the employee to ask questions.
- Determine the first "reporting loop" for you to check the progress of the work (more on reporting loops later).

4. Get the employee's agreement.

The final step of the delegation process is to get the employee's agreement to be accountable for the result. Remember: No agreement, no commitment. No commitment, no result.

Obviously, you're looking for your employees' agreement to the delegations you give them. But there may be good reasons for them to decline. Maybe they think they wouldn't have enough time, given their other accountabilities. Or they don't feel they have enough training or ability to do the job.

The delegation agreement provides your people with an opportunity and a forum to express their concerns. Then you, as the manager, make the final determination about how the task will proceed.

You'll find that this process allows employees to participate more as cooperating adults with their managers in determining how results will be achieved. It will lead to more agreement, more commitment, and better, more timely results throughout your company, in addition to better, more satisfying working relationships.

Following Through to Get the Best Result – Guidelines for Effective Regulation

After you've delegated a task, what then?

How do you know it will proceed as planned? How do you know the employee has really understood everything, and is able to carry it out? How do you know the due date will be met with a satisfactory result?

You establish a system of regulation. Not the overbearing, heavy-handed regulation of an oppressive "big brother." But the caring, involved, cooperative regulation of the "nurturing parent"-type manager.

Employees like the security and predictability of having a defined system for regulating tasks. It lets them know help is available when they need it. They can work with their manager to determine the best way to handle unexpected changes. And they also know that they won't face the horrible situation of putting lots of time and their best effort into something, only to find out at the last minute, when it's too late to do anything about it, that they were off track.

Before we see the right way to regulate work, let's take a look at two common but ineffective ways to do it.

- **The wishful-thinking, mild-mannered "under-regulator."** This manager delegates the task and then sits back, way back, and waits for the result. This is abdicating accountability. When confronted with the possible risk of this approach, she might say, "I trust my people. I don't have time to check up on them all the time. If it doesn't turn out right, I'll just fix it myself."

While this approach may seem respectful to employees and a time saver, it really isn't. It doesn't provide the support employees need to feel secure, nor allow an ongoing flow of open communication. It reduces the chances of employees having the satisfaction of getting the best results themselves, and it eats up time when employees struggle with the task and when the manager then must re-do the work.

Once you've delegated something, never take it back (except in the most extreme circumstances). Taking it back is called "reverse delegation" and it's a damaging practice. It leaves employees feeling undermined and undervalued and managers feeling victimized and angry.

- **The looking-over-your-shoulder, suffocating "over-regulator."** We've all seen this type of manager. Constantly walking up behind you, watching you work, snooping around, asking vague questions like, "How's it going?"

On the spot check-ins are completely counterproductive. They annoy employees, interrupt them, and break their concentration. And they don't give managers any useful information at all about the progress of the work, because the employee was unprepared. In fact, this approach can easily create misunderstanding on the managers' part, since they're only seeing a piece of something at that moment, and not the full picture of what the employee has been doing.

Frequent "status" and "progress" meetings are another symptom of the over-regulator. These become tedious and are usually time wasters. Most of what typically gets accomplished in this type of meeting is better communicated in writing, using project report updates and exception reports.

So, what is the best way to follow through and make sure your employees have the support and guidance they need to get the best results? Here, then, are the guidelines for effective regulation:

1. Use periodic reporting loops to review work.

A reporting loop is simply an intermediate checkpoint in the work process. Your employee will show you the work completed thus far. You will review it and either approve it or offer a "course correction."

The number and frequency of reporting loops needed will depend on the nature of the work, the length of time to complete

it, and the skill of the employee. The more difficult or important the work, the more reporting loops. The longer the project will take, the more reporting loops. The less experienced your employee is at this type of work, the more reporting loops.

There's no magic formula, so do what makes sense. But right at the start of the delegation, schedule with your employee exactly when the reporting loops will occur.

2. Give quick, clear, and direct feedback and instruction.

This step is one of the hallmarks of the most effective managers. It's the essence of what management is all about.

The employees who report to you are always doing something. Use every opportunity, via reporting loops and your ongoing Employee Development Meetings, to work with your people to strengthen their skills and learn new ones.

The best way to do this is to take a specific task and review it with the employee. Point out what the employee did well and why this contributed to the overall result. Explain exactly what should have been done differently and why this would have produced a better result. Do this as soon as possible after the work is done, or when a reporting loop reveals problems. Giving feedback that starts out, "Do you remember the landscaping work you did for the Smiths last month? Well, it would have been better if..." will probably not have much impact.

Tell your employees exactly what you want. If you don't, how can you ever expect them to produce it! But not from the perspective of, "You idiot! You should know what to do. What do you think we're paying you for?" Rather, speak from the perspective of, "Let's talk about the result we need and exactly what it will take to produce it. Since this may be the first time you've been asked to do it this way, let's go through each step so we're both clear on exactly what's needed. Ask me any questions you can think of to help you understand it. Then we'll meet again this Wednesday at 2 o'clock and take another look at it to see how it's progressing."

This is really setting up your employees and yourself for success by becoming better and better at meeting your accountabilities.

3. Communicate in writing.

Always keep this in mind, and make it a standard for everyone in your company: Whenever possible, write it down!

When regulating your employees' work, plan with them from the beginning the best way to keep you informed in writing of the progress of the work. It might be a draft of the work itself, a master checklist with activities checked off as you go, a weekly update report, or a specialized action plan.

4. Avoid under-regulating, over-regulating, reverse delegation, and unnecessary meetings.

Watch yourself vigilantly to be sure you're not falling into any of these traps. Ask your people for feedback to quantify the effectiveness of the way you regulate their work. "What am I doing that works well for you? How am I getting in your way?" They'll appreciate that you've asked, and when you respond by changing your own behavior, you'll see even greater results. You'll be building relationships that really work, for all of you. (See the checklist provided on page 29 of the worksheets section of this process booklet for an example.)

The Heart of the Matter

What happens when someone in your company, a manager, an employee, a vice president, or maybe even you, doesn't agree with a rule, doesn't like a rule, or maybe doesn't like rules at all? What happens then?

First of all, these Principles of Working Relationships aren't rules for "controlling" people and "disciplining" yourself. They're part of a management system to help you get what you want. But you have to believe in, and stand behind, whatever principles you introduce into your company. So take the time to fully consider these principles and to internalize what they really mean. Modify them to fit your own beliefs and principles if you need to. Make them your own. Then let your people know their importance and how these principles will benefit everyone.

But there's still the matter of people not liking the rules. Let's go back to the "rules of the road" example we discussed earlier.

Assume you live in an area where there's a speed limit for driving on the highway. Now let's say that you believe the speed limit is ridiculous. You think you should be able to drive at any speed you like, as long as you're driving safely and not hurting anyone else. Do we have a "moral dilemma" on our hands? Not really.

By freely choosing the place where you live and drive, and by accepting your driving license, you have *agreed* to honor the

rules of the road of that area. You understand there's a greater good behind any individual rule – that of promoting a safe and healthy environment for everyone.

It's like this in the workplace, too. It's up to you to create a game worth playing with its own set of rules. If people believe in the game, they'll willingly embrace the rules.

When people strongly resist a rule, they can't really be in the game, can they? Maybe they never believed in the game in the first place. If they don't, it's better that they leave and find another game that they do believe in. It's best for you, and for them.

When people see your business, and the game worth playing that it represents, as a vehicle through which they can achieve more satisfaction, more of what they really want and, therefore, more life, they have every reason to stand behind the rules of the game.

Working relationships that work result in businesses that work. Isn't that what you've wanted all along?

Making It Happen

Benchmarks for Implementing Principles of Working Relationships

Conduct a baseline evaluation of current working relationships in your company

Adapt the forms, handouts, and policies to your business

Create a plan to train, staff, and implement Principles of Working Relationships

Conduct training; implement the Principles of Working Relationships

Now that you understand the underlying principles that will help you cultivate working relationships that really work to get results throughout your company, you need a plan to make it happen.

1 Conduct a baseline evaluation of current working relationships in your company. Before you introduce these principles to your people, you should find out the status of working relationships as they currently exist. Do people think they're already getting along well enough? Is there a higher level of frustration about how people work together than you realized?

There's a simple form in the worksheets section you can use to evaluate your business' current working relationships. Distribute it to your employees, tell them how long they should keep track of their interactions, collect the completed forms, and tabulate the results. This will give you a specific picture of how your people really experience their relationships with each other.

2 Adapt the forms, handouts, and policies to your business. As you've read and thought about the Principles of Working Relationships presented in this process, you've probably also been considering exactly how they could be "customized" to fit your company. Now's the time to decide whether you'll

implement all the principles and policies, or if you'll modify any of them. Revise the Principles of Working Relationships handout in the worksheets section and the sample Exception Report and Delegation Agreement forms to fit your environment, or adopt them as is.

3 Create a plan to train staff and implement the Principles of Working Relationships. Use the implementation checklist in the worksheets section to clarify your plan for which policies you will implement and when you will introduce them. Of course, you should modify the checklist if necessary. Then create the plan for exactly how your people will be informed and trained. Company-wide meetings, written policy memoranda, management training, and individual employee development meetings can all be part of your implementation approach.

4 Conduct training and implement the Principles of Working Relationships. With your training and implementation plan in place, you're ready to bring these new rules of the game to everyone in your business. As you introduce these new principles, it may take some time for people to fully grasp and embody them. Be the best role model you can, and remind people when you see that they're not displaying the behaviors and attitudes that promote productive working relationships. Hold them to your new standards. Consider ongoing training and coaching for both managers and employees. Remember, the business is a reflection of you and your behavior.

Over time, if you've implemented these principles faithfully, you should see big shifts in the way people work together throughout your organization. And these shifts should result in better business results, as well as a better working environment. Use the comments section on the implementation checklist to track specific changes you see. Also, use the working relationships evaluation form periodically (the same one you used earlier) to measure the ongoing impact of these policies.