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MEL BYERS: HISTORICAL CONCEPTS

Editorial Staff

Visions Editors 1984 Mel Byers, Visions in Leisure and Business, Vol. 3(3), p 4-56.

ABSTRACT

This is a compilation of some of Mel Byers thoughts on employee services from a previous issue of Visions. This represents the perspective of an individual who was a founding member of the employee service movement in the 1940's. The ideas and issues identified represent important factors that are guiding principles for today's professionals.

Key Words: employee services, work place services, program development, operations, human resources, principles and concepts

INTRODUCTION

The nature of work place services is an enduring factor that has been with organizations since the turn of the 20th century. It historically has roots before this time period but it is difficult to trace the initial beginnings for this period. This concept was recognized as important to organization with the development of industrialization. The core concepts and principles have application no matter the era.

EMPLOYEE SERVICES

Uses/Outcomes of Employee Services

The actual outcomes of a program are its training and management potential such as showing someone how to budget time and money, increase in self-concept, and helping certain employees get along with others. The relationships between these outcomes and productivity or profits must be well illustrated. (Trends, p. 18)

It is the function of the employee services director to communicate and sell the ideas of management to the employees and the employees' ideas to management. The employee services director is a bridge or mediator between management and the employees. (Trends, p. 19)

The primary job is one of selling to develop a good climate or environment for employee management interactions through the use of good interpersonal skills. The bottom line of an employee services

program, especially for the company, is better profits. The employee services director must show the relationship between profits and secondary factors such as lower turn-over, more productivity, fewer mistakes, reduced grievances, and how the "family company spirit" translates into benefits. (Trends, p. 19)

The purpose should be the training of employees and improvement of employee skills. Employee services programs should parallel that of the business and its structure should be similar. The same purchasing forms, budgeting procedure, etc., should be used so as to help train the employee in the procedures of the company as well as giving him/her the necessary skill for job advancement. With this type of an objective, it will be better integrated as a company function and not isolated. (NESRA, p. 7)

About 90% of employees should be served. An employee must come in contact at some point with elements under the domain of the employee service. Employee services programs, to reach these individuals must be comprehensive and include such components as food services, refreshments, restrooms, lounge, serve awards program, medical programs, reception areas, equipment purchases that effect the employee, employee sales and merchandising, discounts, flu shots, physicals, recognition programs, special events such as births and deaths, insurance, credit unions, savings and loans, newspapers, bulletin boards, parking lots, janitorial services, security for employees, counseling, profit sharing, suggestion system, evaluation of employees, and dependency counseling. The employee service director must be father, mother, and chaplain. (p. 25)

The most successful program has been some type of 50-50 or 60-40 sharing of the costs as well as the efforts. This type of sharing leads to the valuing of the program by the employer and the employee. (Trends, p. 17)

Importance of Integrating Info on Employee Services into University Education

The opportunities are very good because employee services are such a new field. In fact, the personnel administration is a very young field. For employee services to become a viable area it must be incorporated into institutions of higher education all across the United States. Only then will business institutions recognize the value of employee services programs. The other element is that a greater understanding is needed about what employee services is and this understanding will not come without it being offered in the college curricula. No major university is offering employee services courses or a specialized program in employee services as a part of any course in the College of Business. Radical changes are needed in our colleges and universities because 98% of the courses in personnel administration are negotiating with unions. Much of what is taught in the College of Business is reaction oriented and not preventative oriented such as employee services. (Future, p. 36-37)

Examples of Employee Services Programs

The following are some examples of programs where there are entrepreneurial or innovative opportunities, especially for employee services directors to develop and diversify their program:

1) Day care centers are becoming increasingly popular at places of work because of the increased number of women who are entering the work force. With the increasing concern about child abuses in

day care, there are going to be coming increased opportunities for those who provide quality programs and insure the safety of the children.

2) Services to children are becoming increasingly more important for the reasons listed in item 1. There are increased opportunities for special types of children's services such as babysitting for young children and program services for older children until their parents can arrive home (these individuals have commonly been called "latch-key children"). These services are not only for fulfillment of time but the enriching of the children's life to replace parent relationships.

3) With increased cost of toys and clothes, there are opportunities for toy rental, exchange, sale, or rental of children's clothes, especially for special events. With the way children grow, there is an opportunity for using of the clothes and the children's accessories for only a short period of time.

(Future, p. 41)

4) Once individuals retire, they do not want to sit and play cards all day. Their entire life is not fun and games. Having a placement service and a program based upon retiree enrichment is an area that is being sadly neglected. (Future, p. 41)

10) When people are new in the community, how do they know who are the good doctors and dentists, how to have their water turned on, where to buy groceries, where to have their electricity turned on, etc. You have Welcome Wagon but they only provide advice based on retailers. We used to do this for our employees.

11) Having a home fitness program or home fitness parties to help individuals is important. Some individuals do not like to participate in group activities because they are overweight and do not like to have other people see them. They need individual attention. (Future, p. 42)

13) Widows and widowers need special help for a week or two after their spouse's death. They need help with the insurance, financial consulting, legal advice, help in removing a spouse's clothes, etc. Many times the employee services organization helped with these services. Sometimes employee services programs also provide legal services to their employees on a consulting basis.

14) Developing a local vacation guide and the conducting of tours for churches, senior citizens groups, women's clubs, etc., is profitable. These types of groups are always looking for a day's outing and some type of an enrichment program. The number of organizations in the community that need this type of service is almost limitless. There are always trips within a 100 mile radius of most communities that have some type of entertainment or historical interest such as wineries, president's homes, state historical house, etc.

15) The essential appraising of one's household goods in case of fire or theft is essential. The appraising process would be the taking of photographs so that the individual could keep these in a safe deposit box. Other types of appraisals may be of restaurants, food, etc. Business establishments are looking for comparative, objective opinions.

16) An international institute for foreign students is important. This type of agency could provide interpretive services, business advice, protocol, etc. Those who are foreigners do not have a place to obtain specialized services. (Future, p. 42-43)

There are over 150 services and probably many more. Here are some to give you an indication of the diversity that exists in programs: blood services, service award programs, flowers for a death, birth, sickness, etc., parking lot (with the oldest having the best spot), identification badges, banquets, physicals, reduced price on medicine, insurance that includes life, health, etc., emergency auto services, dressing rooms, food services, vending machines, recreational programs, educational assistance for continuing education, and counseling. (NESRA, p. 8)

Successful/Effective Programs

The first common denominator is food. This is at the very core of most recreational events. Eating out is one of the most popular recreational activities. At most events like sports, food is a central part of the experience. At many social gatherings food is the essential ingredient. The primary factor that makes food such a strong element is its social aspect because people do not like to eat alone. Offer free beer and pretzels and you will not have to worry about having a crowd. Another denominator is win or chance. If you add competition to an event, it adds an element of motivation for greater group participation. The other part of this factor, chance, is by adding door prizes or a lottery for money, etc. You increase the participation and again the motivation to be involved. This concept of chance is often used by businesses in the form of games or in cereal to attract children with toys. A third denominator is activated movement. An example of activated movement is that in many spectator events, especially football, the crowd is exhorted by cheerleaders to perform a movement called a "wave". This causes a greater air of enthusiasm and a feel of involvement in the activity or event. In fact, the purpose of cheerleaders and bands is to excite the crowd through some kind of activated movement process. An example of this type of approach has been McDonald's or a corporation like Show Biz Pizza Place. They provide a playground for the children, entertainment or toys which attract the children, which in turn, attracts the parents. An example of a promotion by McDonald's Corporation was that they were serving hot lunch in a school and they sponsored a coloring contest and all of the drawings were displayed in the local McDonald's and a free french fry coupon was given for participation. Over 85% of the class went to have dinner at McDonald's. This is an example of the use of bonding factors. (Operations, p. 21-22)

COMPANY OPERATION

Employees vs. Employers

Many of the companies are reverting back to the positions that they had at the turn of the century and not valuing their employees. Other companies are showing what can be done during times of adversity. Many are sharing their power and profits. Something has to be done to break this cycle for struggle of power. (Trends, p. 16)

Economics are the primary elements that influence the industry. This same trend is also an important aspect of influencing individual decisions. The pocketbook is one of the most important factors in explaining past influences as well as charting new trends for the future. The American industry has let the concern for money go to the extent, in many instances, that it has become greed. Greed and the concern for money has caused many of the major industries not to reinvest or to share their profits. Those who have had cooperative/collaborative models have been willing to share and have been those who have been more successful and will be more successful in the future. (Trends, p. 17)

He was quite surprised at my statement that if a company does not provide for employee welfare, that they deserve a union. (Trends, p. 18)

An astute manager knows that where there is an effective employee services program, there are usually no unions. In this case, management considers the lesser of two evils and implements its employee

services program. There is no genuine concern for employees and the employee services program is used as an element of social control to keep employees in line. (Trends, p. 18)

There was one company that provided their employees with every type of facility and program in a very benevolent manner. From this give-away program, the company expected loyalty. When problems in negotiation occurred, the employees walked out. The company officials could not understand how their employees could turn on them. As a result, the company reversed its philosophy and took away many of the employee benefits. This brought about unionization and conflicts resulted. This is an example of where the company entered into a give-away program and did not understand its basic purpose and how it could be utilized in relation to individual and organizational goals. Any product, service or goods that is given away is not valued. (NESRA, p. 7)

Company Growth/Success

Innovation and creativity do not only have to be related to products but new marketing approaches. Many times the burgers and the beer are the same but what it takes is a new marketing approach. The best example of this is Wendy's "Where's the Beef" or the "Miller Lite" commercials. (Future, p. 38)

If an organization does not grow or change and tries to maintain a "status quo", there will eventually be a situation in which it cannot cope. It is important to keep the program or organization current so that it can easily respond to change. This is what makes the difference between organizations. (Future, p. 38)

The most effective method of change comes from management itself. When top management wishes to implement a program it is accomplished. (Future, p. 39)

Nothing is perfect; there are always good and bad points about every type of operation. Failure is a learning process. Any operation that has been successful has had to fail several times and build upon this failure as a learning process to achieve success. I have never had a very successful program. The word "successful" is not a very good concept. A better term is effective. (Operations, p. 22)

Very often money and profits are often used as an indicator of success. It is only part of the story. (Operations, p. 23)

There are three important indicators: 1) a low turnover rate, 2) how many people want to obtain employment with that organization, and 3) how many people from an employee services program have moved into leadership management positions. (Operations, p. 24)

Most of the decisions in the business community are made in the short run and the impacts of such a program cannot be seen except in terms of long run. Most of the decisions made in Japan are based upon long run outcomes, not quarterly profits. It takes a tremendous amount of time and investment to cultivate the type of outcomes that we are talking about. (Operations, p. 29)

The reason the colleges and universities are a good source for change is that it is difficult for a subordinate in an organization to educate his superiors. The change process must be institutionalized. There is a natural resentment to this type of process. It can be done but the employee has to be subtle in the methods used. Another possible choice of source of change is the consultant process. But this type

of information cannot be supplied consistently but has been effectively utilized in some cases. (Operations, p. 30)

MISCELLANEOUS

Service Economies vs. Industry

In the past, our economy has been geared to large, heavy industry. But in the future it will be primarily services which will take less capital involvement and we will see a period of greater entrepreneurship and indeed innovation within our society. As our society becomes faster paced, more people working, and our life style changes, the big area of opportunities will be in convenience services. (Future, p. 40)

Convenience services will increase in the future. The more affluent a society becomes the more they desire to be served. This is one of the things that has led to the decay of many societies. (Future, p. 44)

We are moving from a hard to a soft economy and are in a state of transition. There are many good and bad points about a service economy. The primary dimension is psychological. It depends upon how the society will react to increased leisure time. Our society seems to be coping well in that they tend to be using the leisure time in a very productive and energetic manner. (Future, p. 44)

Benefits of Organizations like TIRES (Regional Employee Services Association)

The primary element that has made the organization a success is that the professionals seek information in an applied format so that it is easy to digest and use. (TIRES, p. 10)

It is a service to the industry because of reduced cost and increased services, which is a non-negotiated benefit for the employee. It is a new market for the seller because it represents a large group with low cost advertising and a controlled point of entry in which the salesperson did not have access. (TIRES, p. 11)

There are two basic types of individuals who belong to TIRES, suppliers and purchasers. Purchasers are the employees of the organization and suppliers are those who will sell directly to these employees through a service concept. (TIRES, p. 11)

Such members as Cedar Point, The Magic Kingdom Club, hotels, and car rentals. Many times large suppliers will not deal with small businesses so by being associated with TIRES this allows small companies to be able to purchase these services for their employees. (TIRES, p. 12)

He was able to give a 20% discount because these are the advertising savings that he could pass on to the company. (TIRES, p. 12)

Yes, two examples that come to mind. One is where an employee program was supporting a certain theme park but when the park was visited it was noticed that they were using a competitor's product. This competitor did not support the company's product and as a result a comment was made and their

business was immediately shifted from the competitors. This type of pressure is only possible through an employee services program because it represents consumer power. Another example is when a flower company or nursery was in financial trouble and needed a market in which to sell their product. The employee services director and the sales staff got together and developed a program in which the product was provided to employees on a cost plus basis. After helping the corporation out of a financial bind, they became lifetime customers. (TIRES, p. 13-14)

Many smaller companies do not have the resources to develop an employee services program so the local IRC has been an instrument that has allowed this to develop. (TIRES, p. 14)

TIRES is especially important to the small company because it can purchase many of the benefits for its employees through TIRES which cannot be purchased on the open market. Another important benefit is that they have access to educational programs so that they can learn how to develop a more effective employee services program. Many times small organizations cannot afford a trained employee services director. (TIRES, p. 14-15)

Importance of Applied Information

The primary element that has made the organization a success is that the professionals seek information in an applied format so that it is easy to digest and use. (TIRES, p. 10)

Keynotes is idea sharing. It was put together much in the format of the Kiplinger Newsletter in that the information provided is in an abbreviated format and that the information that is provided has some instant application. It is also information that is not readily available to the practitioner. In employee services, there are not many ideas out there that are not new. What I would do is research these ideas and put them in a form usable to the practitioner. Practitioners do not want to read copy; they want something that is useful. They do not want the "Blue Sky" type of thinking. (Mel Byers, p. 5)

Miscellaneous

Another example was when I visited a major auto manufacturer to do a program evaluation and the first visit I made was to the parking lot to see how many of the employees owned a car they helped make. The question was asked at the end of the day what I felt about their employee services program and my first comment was that they did not have many employees who drive their make of cars. I told him that the employees must not think very much of their company or product because they did not buy a car they helped to make. They should know. I would see that every employee had a car or could afford a car that they made. This is a good form of advertisement. (Operations, p. 31)

CONCLUSION

The statements identified are only a sampling of the thoughts of Mel Byers expressed through the years. In order to get a complete understanding of his perspective, all his materials must be reviewed from the publications of the national organization as well as his publication Keynotes. One of the basic principles behind his philosophy is the carrying for employees and the development of a family

atmosphere. It is the sincere caring that helps build relationships. The purpose is the development and fulfillment of the goals and objectives of the individual and the organization. It is through this common perspective that true potentials can be reached. The differences between the earlier eras and the current times are the perspective of independence. In the earlier eras, one had to solve problems through ingenuity because there were not any available resources to rely upon other than yourself and colleagues. Today, there is a tremendous technology allows for help in solving problems. Sometimes this does not help the individual develop independence of thought and action. The reliance on this technology may be detriment. Any concepts and principles have to be adapted now around this technology for their progressive application. An expression of this is convenience and the desire to have everything provided in a very accessible format. This is an issue that has resulted in a lifestyle that influences both work and an individual's environment.