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Missing loyalty leads to 'Yes Man' phenomenon

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My father struggles to understand me, even though I just recently turned 35 and have had a successful and varied career.

His professional career began at [Texas Instruments](#). Soon after, the company underwrote his pursuit of a master's degree. Dad's loyalty for his employer has never wavered. After 40-plus years, he remains a dedicated and productive employee (his division was sold to [Raytheon](#) in 1997) and has led implementation initiatives for the company.

My somewhat nomadic livelihood puzzles him. Work force dynamics have changed. It is common for youthful workers to have numerous employers in the first 10 to 15 years of their careers. In today's depressed economy, employers can only hope for employee loyalty like my father's.

A lack of employee loyalty can impact one's business. Recent studies conducted by Deloitte, StrategyOne, Robert Half International and Hewitt Associates show people who survive company layoffs (otherwise known as Survivor workers) tend to have high anxiety, low self-esteem and concerns about job security.

This situation has created a notable paradigm called the "Yes Man Phenomenon" or the YMP, which is the fall-in-line-and-do-what-is-asked-of-you-regardless syndrome. Symptoms include:

- Supervisors always hear what they want to hear.
- Employees do not stick to convictions.
- Your staff's opinion is always your opinion.
- Employees lack emotional investment in their job.

YMP fosters a lack of ingenuity and risk-taking. Employees ignore their convictions and don't push for what they believe is right.

In turn, this causes a decrease in emotional investment in a job. Employees begin to feel their opinion is not respected; they become emotionally detached and, in turn, add less value to their role. Ironically, a job candidate's initiative and willingness to step outside the box are often the reasons they are hired in the first place.

"The manager is key to avoiding the 'Yes Man Syndrome,' " says **Allen Wesson**, internal auditor for the Dallas Independent School District. "He or she does not have the only good ideas. The reason for hiring smart people is to use their ideas, knowledge and abilities to increase performance."

Abe Paul, director of internal audit at [Michaels Stores](#), points out that successful companies encourage open communication in their culture. "Engaged employees are crucial in creating a world-class company."

I believe one of the keys to fighting YMP is to foster a trusting working environment in which the employee's thoughts and ideas are valued and requested. Companies known for valuing their employees, during this tough economic season, have set the foundation for engaged employees."

Just say 'No'

In order to combat YMP, managers should encourage initiative:

- Stick to convictions. Stress that strong convictions are a valued part of the moral fiber of the organization. Employees will respect managers who foster this atmosphere and have a stronger bond with their company.
- Empower employees to give honest opinions. Create an environment where ideas and opinions flow freely and employees are motivated to excel in their roles. Wesson of the Dallas Independent School District tells of an employee who approached him with a plan to expand school audits. "I gave her time and freedom to develop her idea and it has resulted in an audit program that adds significant value to the school and district." Show appreciation for alternative opinions, and consider them, regardless if it goes against the grain.
- Employees should do what is right and proper. During my numerous speaking engagements, I have heard complaints about employees whose job security is more important than doing what is right for the company. Again, an environment that fosters fear of retaliation and reductions in force should not exist.
- Do what you are paid for. Finally, managers should reiterate that employees are paid to do their job. That means performing to the best of one's abilities. Empower employees to excel. Free-flowing ideas and thoughts inspire innovation and can help manage risk.

The Yes Man Phenomenon can have one more consequence: Once the economy turns around, managers who have identified the "Yes Men" for their lack of gumption will have more flexibility to replace them with employees who bring more innate value to the organization.

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