

Men at Work

Dear Small Business Owner:

I'm going to do a little picking on men in this article. But hang with me; I will show that there is a lot we can learn from them too!

A recent study was completed, studying the life of crews on offshore oil rigs over a 15 year period. While this may not sound like the most fascinating of places to live, work and do a study, the findings of the research revealed some very interesting changes in the working practices of this typically macho-behaved male environment.

Since macho-behaved men can be found in other work-environments, there is something many companies can learn from what was discovered. Read on to see what helped these employees be better able to do their best work.

The oil platforms that were studied over 15 years had deliberately jettisoned the hard-driving, macho culture in favor of an environment where men admit when they've made mistakes, explore what caused the mistakes, appreciate each other publicly, and routinely ask for and offer help. Gasp. I know many of us are finding it hard to believe that such an environment exists anywhere out there!!



Researchers found the key was getting workers to shift their focus from proving their masculinity to larger goals: maximizing the safety and well-being of coworkers and doing their jobs effectively. This new attitude was pushed down from the top. Management's thinking was that you can't be safe or effective unless you expose errors and learn from them. Workers came to appreciate that to improve safety and performance in a potentially deadly environment, they had to be open to new information that challenged their assumptions, and to acknowledge when they were wrong.

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This new thinking revealed 2 things. First, that much of the macho behavior was not only unnecessary but actually got in the way of doing their jobs. Second, their notions about what constituted strong leadership needed to change. They found out that the people who used to rise to the top (the "biggest, baddest roughnecks"), weren't the best at improving safety and effectiveness. Rather, the ones who excelled were mission-driven guys who cared about their fellow workers, were good listeners and were willing to learn. Over 15 years, as this was implemented, accident rates declined drastically, and productivity, efficiency and reliability increased beyond the industry's benchmarks.



The problem wasn't the use of stereotypical masculine attributes as many tasks do require aggressiveness, emotional detachment, and strength. The bigger issue was when men thought they had to prove themselves on these dimensions, regardless of whether it was really needed. By creating conditions that focus people on the real requirements of the job, organizations can free employees to do their best work.

Material taken from Harvard Business Review, July-August 2008, "Unmasking Manly Men"

If your company is having trouble getting the best performance from your men (and women), give Alpha Business Coaching a call.

Sincerely,

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