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Nursery Rhymes Can be Effective Teaching Tools for Managers

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Nursery rhymes aren't just quaint bedtime stories used to pacify a tumultuous toddler into submission for bedtime. Some bedtime stories actually have overarching principles that can be utilized to illustrate the fundamentals of successful management practices.

Effective principles and routines in managing employees can be classified in a similar fashion to the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. The porridge can be a metaphor for a manager's routines with direct reports and their management style: too hot (too much), too cold (too little), and just right.

Prevalent industry research reflects that five to eight direct reports is a good ratio, with six being the optimal number of direct reports. Even if a manager has the optimal number of direct reports, the manager's management style and routines (or lack thereof) directly impacts the success, satisfaction and longevity of their direct reports at their organization.

For instance, if a manager is too tough and micromanages every single movement, the employee will more than likely start relying on the manager to make all of the decisions and do all of the thinking, resulting in ineffective management and providing negative results.

In contrast, over-empowerment can also be a recipe for disaster. A manager can empower their employees directly into failure. Oftentimes, the lack of oversight caused by over-empowerment can ensure that problems are not reflected for many years.

So, what is the right formula for management – when is it just right?

Fundamentals for "just right" management styles include making sure the managers/leaders always allocate time for their direct reports. This can mean setting up regularly scheduled meetings or sessions so information can be shared in a structured environment consistently. The manager will know when they are in sync with their direct report when most of the items on the manager's list correlate to a large proportion of the items on the employee's list of items to discuss. The direct report should know more

detailed information on the content, but as a supervisor, the manager should keep things at a high level and support the employee in their decision-making process. An effective manager's role is similar to that of a traffic cop – traffic cops don't stop drivers on a daily basis to see how they are doing, instead their job is to keep the driver safe or "out of the ditch" (going to extremes), but not exceeding the speed limit where the driver would receive a ticket or by traveling below the speed limit and causing massive congestion.

The bottom line is, managers need to find routines that allow them to support their direct reports in a "just right" formula. Managers may need to customize their communication style in their management routines for different direct report personalities, as each employee is motivated differently. As an effective leader, the manager should adapt to their direct report's learning styles and allow them to earn their flexibility in decision making by using a previous pattern of making great decisions, learning from their mistakes, and knowing when to ask for advice. The key for every institution is to determine what is right for your organization's culture and develop consistency in the organization's management expectations and routines. Is your management style too hot, too cold, or just right? Would your direct reports agree with your answer?

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