**Business Etiquette and the Chain of Command**

by Russell Huebsch

Following proper chain of command etiquette not only improves business skills, it helps a company run more smoothly and efficiently. Chaos in a company would arise if employees could do anything and report to whoever they wanted. However, employees sometimes feel the need to break the chain of command because of a failure of the company's management.

Following a Chain of Command

The chain of command means going to the next level of authority. For instance, a rank-and-file worker would report to a supervisor, and the supervisor reports to a manager. In American business culture, workers should not skip up the ladder. For example, an entry-level employee should not complain to the CEO about a problem with a fellow co-worker. Breaking the chain of command shows a lack of respect for authority.

Exceptions

Sometimes an employee has no choice but to break the chain of command. Workers most often break the chain of command because of a supervisor ignoring complaints, according to Jeffrey Kassing in a 2009 Journal of Business Communication article. An employee might also break the chain of command to voice his opinion about a supervisor with poor work performance, or to report ethics violations -- such as a manager stealing from the company.

Informal Organizations

Companies of any significant size develop an informal network because of office chatter and social relationships. Informal organizations have their own leadership hierarchy and organization. Participants in an informal group tend to organize based on department or similarities in job duties. Managers often use the informal network to sidestep the red-tape in the formal organization. For instance, a manager might work with the leader of an informal group to improve productivity rather than attempting to reprimand employees. Leaders frequently support or encourage the use of an informal network.

Tips

Leaders should teach their employees about the chain of command. A problem should stay at the lowest possible chain in the hierarchy unless the supervisor feels it deserves the attention of a higher-up. Employees should study the organization's chain of command and respect it. Determining who to report can become difficult in unorthodox companies, such as a matrix organization. In a matrix organization, for instance, a worker can have several managers that have authority over an employee to utilize his skill set when needed.

**TDL Companies’ Command Chain Scenarios**

**TDL Company 1: FedEx**

The FedEx Corporation consists of approximately 325,000 employees. Its organizational structure begins with the FedEx Corporation at the top. Then the Corporation is divided into four major divisions: FedEx Services, FedEx Express, FedEx Ground, and FedEx Freight. The FedEx Services division can be divided into two smaller categories: FedEx Office and FedEx Tech-Connect. Fed Express can also be divided into two smaller categories: FedEx Trade Networks and FedEx Supply-Chain. FedEx Ground oversees a smaller category called FedEx Smart-post. Finally, FedEx Freight oversees a smaller category called FedEx Custom Critical.

**TDL Company 2: Coca-Cola**

The command chain for Coca-Cola is quite complex. At the top, there is the company leader. He/She oversees six major divisions of the company: marketing, manufacturing and research, administration, internal decision, finance, and strategic planning. From the internal decision division, there are area managers. These are managers who oversee operations in Europe, Africa, North and South America, and the Middle and far East. Each of the regions has area staff connected to it. Each area staff is controlled by a country subsidiary, which is a smaller company that runs Coca-Cola in that country or area alone.

**TDL Company 3: Amazon**

The command chain for Amazon begins with the Board of Directors at the top. There are 3 divisions that branch out of the board: Corporate R & D, Jeff Bezos Founder and CEO, and the Corporate HQs Staff. Below them in the chain of command are 5 different divisions of the company: CEO of Marketing, CEO of Operations, CEO of Business Expansion, CEO of Development, and CEO of Editorial. Each of these categories is in charge of various duties within the company. The CEO of Marketing oversees Advertising, Communications, and Strategic Relationships; the CEO of Operations is in charge of Warehouse Operations, Customer Service, Special Orders, and Customer Programs. The CEO of Business Expansion directs Business Development, including New Product and Service Development. The CEO of Development oversees Software Design, Development, and Maintenance. The CEO of Editorial is in charge of Web Site Design, Editorial Content, and Book Features.