

YOUR MANAGERS WHO WON'T MANAGE OR LEAD WILL IMPAIR YOUR COMPANY'S PERFORMANCE

A young executive I know took a job recently at a large, international company, working for a high profile executive. The new position held the promise of not only much higher pay and better benefits, but a chance to grow professionally, learn new skills, and travel, both within and outside the continental U.S. The company itself is recognized globally for its breadth of operations and position within its industry and it has grown substantially through mergers and acquisitions. By all accounts, it should be an interesting and great place to work.

The high profile boss of this young executive apparently is a talented, creative individual. She spends significant face time with senior management of the corporation and sets her own schedule. This schedule includes a great deal of time working from home. Her direct reports often receive email from her sent between 1:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. in the morning, although they don't see her very often in the corporate office. She's usually "too busy" to meet with her people individually to talk about the progress on their projects, their needs for her assistance in managing contacts and information requests throughout the company, or what they need to do to improve their performance. In fact, when they've completed all of their work and are actively seeking additional projects to pursue, her people look to her for more direction, but often don't get any direction from her. Yet if they stretch too far to take on projects that she hasn't specifically approved, they're likely to face rebuke from her.

So what this company is dealing with is an executive working around the clock, sometimes allegedly for days without sleep, to accomplish her department's objectives, while her people are left to look for constructive opportunities to pursue on their own. She admits that she's not had "much experience at managing people." By all accounts, she's not being forced to get much experience at it, either. In fact, our young executive learned recently from other managers that there has been turnover in her department in the past precisely because of this pattern of behavior. Yet senior management looks the other way.

Several questions come to mind here: Why does senior management allow this department head to continue in her dysfunctional ways? Do they not care, or don't they recognize the need for her to learn to manage her people properly? Does her supervisor not know how to manage or coach people, either? Does senior management explicitly condone this behavior in general? Why doesn't her boss see the problem when her peers and direct reports see it so clearly?

This situation could be representative of the "dead rat in the living room" syndrome. Everyone knows there's a dead, stinking carcass in the room, but no one wants to talk about it or do anything to remove it. Why? Perhaps one reason is that this executive's behaviors reflect badly on her boss. To admit that she's run through a number of promising, talented subordinates and continues working as an individual contributor rather than as a manager would be to admit that he has not done his job in getting her ready for management.

In any event, the young executive working for her has had more experience and training in people management than this boss. The young executive has decided to pursue other career options. The company, senior management and the unruly boss will continue on, apparently doing the same things the same way, with continued turnover in this department. It doesn't have to be this way. But it will be as long as senior management condones these behaviors. This is food for thought for all of us. What behaviors are we condoning by ignoring them in our own organizations? What messages are we sending to the rest of our people? What messages do we really want to send to them?

Dom and his firm assist managers with growth, strategy and performance issues, including organization development, team building, partnering and coaching.