

The Power of a Cup of Coffee



By Carl Tompkins—Originally produced in May, 2007 for NGA AG Magazine



As customers become more sophisticated, competition intensifies and costs escalate, aggressive companies hunt for new and more productive means of increasing revenue and profit. The results of these efforts include mergers, buyouts, product additions and deletions, service modifications and business diversification. Yet, these aggressive companies often fail to reach their financial or time-related goals. In such cases, management focuses all of its time and effort on the numbers rather than its No. 1 asset: its people.

Financial failure stems from a failure in personnel management. So, if the proper supervision of people is vital, why don't managers refocus their attention? As silly as it sounds, numbers don't talk back. Good personnel management is harder to implement and creates more variables than fixed assets. Thus, managers set it aside.

A cup of coffee is a miraculous tool that business managers can use to get back on track with their personnel. I refer to it as "miraculous" because it is so simple, yet generates such powerful and positive results.

The power of a cup of coffee lies in what it represents: a pleasant experience; a delightful refreshment; a time to relax, visit, regroup and share. In the hands of business management, a cup of coffee provides one-on-one time with direct-reporting employees away from the office and an opportunity to re-establish the much-needed social fiber within the organization. Used properly, it proves to employees that no matter how busy or tough work gets, their boss sees

them as a person, not a number.

To use the cup-of-coffee concept properly, schedule at least one coffee break per month with each direct-reporting employee. The event must take place away from the office, where no interruptions can occur. McDonalds is just fine. You buy, and then ask how the employee is doing. After some sincere personal discussion, ask how things at work are going and what you, as his or her boss, can do to help. Identify needs and ideas, and seek the employee's opinion to confirm you're both on the same page. Conclude the cup of coffee by expressing your confidence in the employee's abilities and your appreciation for the work that he or she does. Let the employee know that you'll be getting together again in the near future. If you have agreed to take action on a topic, confirm what you've discussed.

In conducting training courses for many different types of companies, I always incorporate the cup-of-coffee concept as part of the curriculum. I explain that it starts at the top of the organization and should be used at every management level. I also tell senior management that a successful training program requires follow up with employees and that the results can be tied directly to those cups of coffee. Case in point, the senior management of a company raved about the training course but nothing changed within the organization. The managers had yet to have one cup of coffee with their employees.

However, another top business executive reported a business improvement of 21 percent in 90 days following the same training course. He reported it wasn't his employees that had changed, but himself.



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He followed up with his employees more often than once a month, in a variety of ways that went well beyond a cup of coffee.

Remember, there is nothing wrong with throwing in a lunch once in awhile. Depending on the condition of your team, it may take three cups of coffee before employees begin to open up and share their thoughts. As you might imagine, the level of trust the employee has with their supervisor will influence how many cups of coffee will be needed before positive results occur. Stick with it; you'll be amazed at the results. As one business owner in Connecticut reported, next to making bigger and more regular bank deposits, having a cup of coffee with each of this 6 direct-reporting employees is the most important monthly function he faithfully completes.

