Valentine's Day in the workplace
Building intrinsic motivation for performance and profits

Part 6 of the Stealth Quality Series

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Introduction

My husband hates Valentine's Day.

I've decided that's understandable after listening to many people. Scientific or not, the message in my mini-poll was always the same: they feel under pressure to produce some visible, tangible proof of their feelings toward their mates. This morning, the day before Valentines Day in some of the worst economic conditions I have seen, my husband asked me if I wanted flowers.

"No, Dear," I assured him, "I know you love me."

We've been together long enough that I feel sure he knows he won't be subject to a double standard. I won't pout on the Big Day, having told him the gesture isn't required but using the day as a kind of test to see if he did it just because he wanted to.

Organizational excellence depends on relationship management almost as much as our personal relationships do. There's a near-axiom among members in the Quality Assurance community that most problems are based on the process versus human behavior. That could be true if we had done all we can to error proof, but how do we error-proof the human element?

There is a ton of advice for leaders and managers about this question, and rows of books in the bookstore's Management section. Feel free to buy and read as many as you like, but I suggest the insights might be as close as home on Valentine's Day:

1) Pick who suits you
2) Matchmaker, matchmaker
3) Pulling together
4) He loves me, he loves me not: communication
5) Show me the love: rewards that work
6) Breaking up is hard to do

1) Pick who suits you

I've heard that opposites attract, but relationships need more than attraction to thrive. Diversity in our workforce can bring rewards, but only if and when we make it possible. We need to not only accept each others' differences; we need to capitalize on them. What does that mean?

- Seek partners who compliment us. This seems obvious, but career coach Leigh Branham says 35 percent of employees leave in the first six months. A study of 19,700 exit and current employee surveys from 17 different industries indicated the top reason for this turnover was "The job or workplace was not as expected." [i] To make this relationship work we first need an honest understanding of who we are and what shortcomings need to be filled. That means we need to *understand and recognize our goals, strengths and weaknesses*. We need to be ready to describe our vision and how the new employee fits in. Understanding that means we recognize our own shortcomings, even if the exercise makes us feel uncomfortable.

- Don't try to change each other. We can ask for specific outcomes and behaviors to enable an efficient outcome and customer satisfaction, but it's no good to attract diverse partners and then try to make them like us.

- Keep the long range view in mind as well as the immediate goal. This isn't easy. But if we have long range goals, why pursue a fling? Keep your head; consider how the employee would fit into the organization's mission as well at its goals, strategies and objectives. That might mean taking a cautious approach when we believe we would be better suited with radical, exciting change. This presents a conundrum that we should be willing and ready to address. We should develop a means to do that, so we don't wind up a year after commitment asking, "What was I thinking?"

For example: ABC Sprinkler Company was started with the 15-year goal of growth sufficient to allow its original owners to sell the company and retire comfortably. Both short and long-term goals should be considered when selecting a senior pipefitter as one of the partners:

Short term needs	Long term needs
Technical expertise	Will teach apprentices to the point of state licensure
High productivity (works quickly)	Will oversee several road crews as Project Manager
Reliable	Will ensure all crews obey safety and labor laws

Table 1

Avoiding costs of hiring more employees than we need means understanding how much of a balance we can accept. Startups may not feel as though they have a full range of choices, but should still identify what they will eventually expect out of their people. Their alternative is to revisit the hiring process when it is time to fill the long term needs.

2) Matchmaker, Matchmaker

We should understand our own needs and what we expect of our employees. Building this *organizational intelligence* during good times may help us maintain stability under stress. When demand returns we can use the institutional knowledge we have built and kept, and avoid both

good faith and rash mistakes that are inherent risk of bringing in new partners. To build organizational intelligence we plan work with enough detail to understand what needs to be done, prepare and apply the right people to the right job, and be ready to meet needs as they arise.

1) Understand what needs to be done
   The traditional methods are still relevant and useful:
   a. *Job analysis* describes and records:
      - The job's purposes
      - Required major duties or activities
      - Conditions under which the job is performed
      - Competencies: skills, knowledge, abilities etc. that enable and enhance a person's ability to perform the duties and activities.
   b. *Competency modeling* describes what personal capabilities and talents are required:
      - Skills and knowledge
      - Values
      - Interests
      - Personality
      - Physical attributes
   c. *Job descriptions* combine job analyses and competency modeling to describe the essential job functions or duties.[ii]

2) Plan for the right match: matrix approach
   Traditional human resource planning takes the job analyses and tries to find employees with the best fit possible, hiring from the outside or reassigning internally with the expectation that the employee will eventually succeed. Both approaches can work, but both carry a risk of getting the match wrong or taking too long to fill the need. A matrix can be used as an alternative, to plan the jobs according to skills the organization already has with existing employees.

Knowledge Required	Activities	Standards / Certifications
What it does: Provides information on the knowledge required to perform the activities of the skill block.	What it does: Provides information on the activities performed in the skill block.	What it does: Provides standards/certifications that will result when an employee has the appropriate knowledge and successfully performs the activities in the skill block. Whenever possible this should provide quantitative information.
Examples: • Knowledge of new account development technique. • Knowledge of company products and services.	Examples: • Make sales calls. • Represent company at trade shows.	Examples: • Five sales calls completed every month. • One closed sale account each quarter.

Table 2

Process			Activities	Skills required	Standards / Certifications	Who is available	What's left to qualify	Cost to qualify
Supplier Quality	1		Interface with supplier representatives to collect process capability and performance data.	Communication: in-person, telephone, electronic.	n/a	Jim Pierce	n/a	n/a
						Alex Bennett		
						Sara Rogers		
	2		Perform on-site supplier audits	Auditing; manufacturing/assembly; communications.	TS 16949 ISO 9001 ISO 14001	Alex Bennett	Up to 25% travel Lead Auditor school	$4,750
						Sara Rogers		
	3		Administer supplier self-audit questionnaires	MS Access; organizational skills; electronic communications	n/a	Jim Pierce	n/a	n/a
						Sara Rogers		
	4		Respond to Incoming Inspection rejection notices. Disposition rejected materials and products; enter results into supplier management database.	MS Access; organizational skills; electronic communications	n/a	Jim Pierce	n/a	n/a
						Sara Rogers		
	5		Open and manage CAPAs for incoming material and product issues. Enter data into Supplier Database. Track and report on progress to site QA Manager.	Communication: in-person, telephone, electronic. Organizational skills. MS Access.	n/a	Jim Pierce	n/a	n/a
						Alex Bennett		
						Sara Rogers		
	6		Process annual supplier scorecards. Communicate results to site QA Manager. Communicate scorecard results to suppliers. Interface with supplier QAEs to negotiate improvements and track outcomes.	Communication: in-person, telephone, electronic. Organizational skills. MS Access.	n/a	Jim Pierce	n/a	n/a
						Alex Bennett		
						Sara Rogers		

Table 3

A matrix approach can be used instead of defined job descriptions when identifying the people best suited for our needs. A simple count of qualifications can be performed, or importance figures can be assigned to each activity and added up for weighted comparisons.

When performing this exercise it was discovered that one employee was a "perfect fit" while the other two are ready to perform as backups. The matrix can also be used for reorganizations and to identify backup employees or to design workshare programs.

Employee	Skill strength
Jim Pierce	0.83
Alex Bennett	0.67
Sara Rogers	1.00

3) Pulling together

As individuals we usually know what we need to do and what we care about, but we might find it's not so easy to turn that into a common vision, goals and strategies, and a definition of accomplishment.

It helps to understand motivation. We can look at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and notice there can be different motivators for different people.
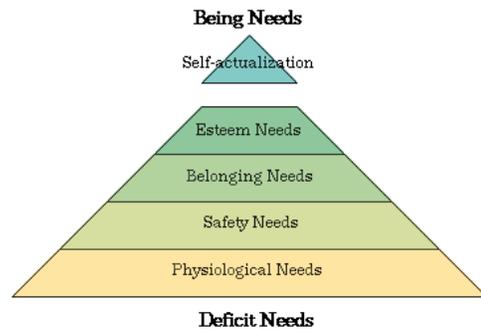

Figure 1

1	**Physiological needs:** what our bodies need to function properly and stay healthy.
2	**Safety and security needs:** an interest in finding safe circumstances, stability, protection; perhaps structure, for order, and some limits.
3	**Love and belonging needs:** friends, a sweetheart, children, affectionate relationships in general, even a sense of community.
4	**Esteem needs:** respect of others, status, fame, glory, recognition, attention, reputation, appreciation, dignity, even dominance. A higher form involves a need for self-respect, confidence, competence, achievement, mastery, independence, and freedom.
5	**Self-actualization.** Maslow used a variety of terms to refer to this level: growth motivation, being needs and self-actualization. These are needs that do not involve balance or homeostasis. Once engaged, they continue to be felt. In fact, they are likely to become stronger as we "feed" them. They involve the continuous desire to fulfill potentials, to "be all that you can be." They are a matter of becoming the most complete, the fullest, "you" – hence the term, self-actualization.[iii]

Table 4

Safety (security) needs are also almost always present in relationships to some degree. Some people need workplace stability, safety and security more than they need to feed their self esteem at work. Such people may be quite reliable, but unquestioning. They won't venture forward with suggestions for doing things better, and they may never seek more training or greater responsibility.

People with needs beyond that of job security should be recognized as potential sources of strength. For each level of need an opportunity exists to build loyalty and a sense of partnership. Research done by Sirota et.al shows that while employees often enjoy associating with each other during breaks,

> "…their greatest satisfaction comes from interacting as a team on the job in the service of common performance goals…Cooperation – not job descriptions, not organizational charts, not formal procedures – is the glue that binds the parts of the organization"[iv]

Employees with esteem built by a sense of accomplishment at work will often crave respect, enough job autonomy to meet their objectives without serious interference, open communication and a sense of purpose. Positions at all levels can have esteem needs fulfilled by work others view as menial. For example, Sirota's survey responses often included janitorial staff expressing a sense of accomplishment in their own terms: "Do you know what this place would be like without me?"[v]

4) He loves me, he loves me not: communication

These are hard times for business. Most of us can't afford bonuses to reassure our employees of their value, and there is a limit to their performance without some kind of emotional sustenance. Some employees will pull harder just to help ensure they stay employed, but many will need more than character-driven initiative to help us do more with less.

Couples in relationships often cite communication problems when seeking help. Declarations such as "I'm not a mind reader, you know!" are common. The workplace conditions are different than personal relationships in that they are not based on emotional ties, but we still need to understand where we fit in and how we are doing. How can we communicate with our people when we are so busy? How can we tell the difference between enough and too much?

Too little, too late

People in both personal and professional relationships may assume the worst when confronting a communication void. When receiving no feedback on their performance and left to interpret behaviors in stressed managers, many employees may assume they do not have the full faith of their managers. The urge to conclude they are of little value can be especially strong in an environment where layoffs are used as a tool for boosting productivity. When developing the Theory X and Theory Y in 1960 to describe the personal tendencies in two basic classifications (self-motivated and externally motivated), D.M. McGregor argued that misinterpreting behaviors could be self-fulfilling.[vi] Figure 2 shows the damage that an incorrect assumption can do, starting with "I feel like my manager doesn't approve of me: she is always irritable when we talk." A self-defeating assumption can affect behavior and performance outcomes:
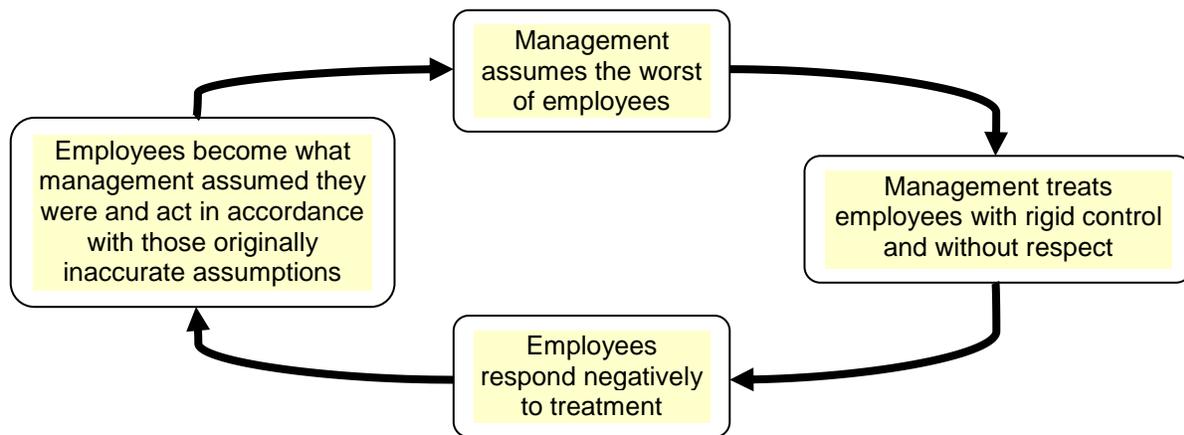
Figure 2

Patterson, et.al described their visit to a wood processing plant where they observed Figure 2's dynamic in person:

> You can imagine my surprise when employees mentioned the hog (shack where scraps were ground into sawdust by a monstrous set of saw blades) as their cure to poor supervision. *"We don't throw the boss into the hog,"* someone went on to explain. *"We throw good plywood into the hog. That way we kill his productivity numbers and get him in trouble."* Revenge, sabotage, payback—that was the game. If a boss did something employees didn't like, they

got even by "feeding the hog." It wasn't long until we coined the expression "The Law of the Hog." Meaning: When employees dislike how they've been treated, expect a drop in productivity.[vii]

Workplace communication comes more easily to some than others. Even talented communicators may still need to make an effort under times of stress. We can keep certain principles in mind:

- Understand ourselves first. As leaders and managers we often focus on other people without first identifying what is important to us and why. Our personal strengths, shortcomings and passions all factor in what we do and how we do it, as well as our expectation of others.
- Focus on what's important. The higher we are on Maslow's hierarchy, the more we need a vision of some kind to feel a sense of purpose. People in relationships and workplaces need some idea of their purpose too, to avoid falling into boredom, randomness or chaos.
- Keep the vision alive. As a constant stream of demands distracts us, communicating and reinforcing the vision is critical. In times of stress such as reorganizations or downsizing, effective communication requires special effort to maintain the sincerity in our partnerships with employees. Sirota et.al advise us that

    > Conviction and credibility – not salesmanship – are the keys...The plan should be communicated both through the organization's formal media as a message from the CEO and in small group meetings of managers with their employees. To accomplish the latter, it is first necessary to meet with managers up and down the line to fully brief them on what is being planned and why, to answer their questions and concerns, and to prepare them for their meetings with employees[viii]

- Work through difficulties. Paulson advises to

    > Develop a communication style that focuses on future problem solving rather than getting stuck in proving a conviction for past mistakes. You want change, not just an admission of guilt. Winners of arguments never always win, because consistent losers never forget. You want results, not enemies seeking revenge. By focusing on future problem solving, both can save face.[ix]

Lloyd goes into specifics on communication methods for dealing with complainers:

  - Identify the reason for complaints. Meet with them and let them put all of the complaints on the table.
  - Address the complaints one by one. Indicate exactly what you will or will not do with them. Provide specific techniques for the complainer to resolve some of them, as practical.

Lloyd advises us that by looking carefully at the quantity and quality of the complaints and at actions already taken to resolve them, we can get a much clearer idea about what motivates the complaining.[x]

5) Show me the love: rewards that work

Hearts and flowers

If we do honest introspection we can learn a lot about ourselves via our behavior when times are bad. If we look at others carefully we can learn from them too. Why are some couples happy for

their lifetimes when they barely have two nickels to rub together? Why do some pull together when a child dies, while others' relationship falls apart?

Our people need some sign of how we value them. How contented couples do it when limited in cash? They might tell us it is about the little things they do to show caring:

- Clearly stating value: "You are so good at that. I never could bake a pie like you do – the crust always falls apart." Translation: "I'm so glad Fred picked you for the team. Your organizational skills are just amazing."
- Ask if they are doing okay: "You look tired. Can I carry that for you?" Translation: "How is the project going? You've got quite a load this week. Can I help in some way?"
- Provide timely, honest feedback: "Thank you so much for making dinner. It was so good, and I am very tired." Translation: "I really appreciate your taking on that meeting for me. I was at my limit with these surprise issues."

Many people find spontaneous praise very difficult. I once had a boss who thought so. I once asked him "Am I doing inspections as you want – am I doing okay?" He replied, "When you do something wrong I will tell you." I felt deflated. What can I do with feedback like that?

Managers who are uncomfortable with spontaneous praise may benefit by focusing on specific points of the employee's performance, taking care to avoid commenting on personal behavior or attributes. Staying within relevant subjects that we are clearly competent in helps ensure our feedback includes valuable input for helping the employee progress further, and can reinforce sincerity.

Timeliness helps to express a sense of value. Receiving feedback soon after an accomplishment can convey sincerity in even the most stoic of people as opposed to waiting until even a stellar yearly employee performance review. Timely follow up is just as important. If we ask for a change in performance or behavior we should not delay acknowledgment that the correction has been positive or leaves room for further improvement. Sirota points out that follow up as a practical chance to deliver a compliment and reinforce the good behavior.

Practical praise

Although Sirota stresses the importance of recognizing good performance, listing rewards in form of compensation, informal recognition, formal award programs and promotions.[xi] It is important to remember, however that many employees are also uncomfortable with overt expressions, even cash rewards. Nelson and Spitzer agree, stressing in The 1001 Rewards & Recognition Fieldbook what they call the "Money Motivation Myth":

> …for most of us, most of the time, once we are able to comfortably keep up with our monthly bills, our self-esteem quickly and inevitably turns to other factors that have greater significance: feeling we are making a contribution, having a manager that tells us we are doing a good job, having the respect of our peers and colleagues, being involved and informed about what is going on in the company, and doing meaningful, interesting work.[xii]

Making an effort to understand our people can help identify those who prefer to take personal satisfaction in their own professional achievements over public displays such as Employee of the Month awards. Nelson and Spitzer recommend that we simply ask our people what motivates them: have them jot down how they like to be thanked, and spend enough time with them to find out what type of work activities interest them, skills they'd like to learn, the direction they'd like their career to take, and even hobbies. "Help them reach their goals and your employees will want to help the organization succeed in return."[xiii]

To avoid the demotivating effect of erratic, unfairly distributed rewards an organization can set up a program that plans what to do and why manages costs and recognizes benefits. Nelson and Spitzer recommend six elements:
1) **Action plan:** steps needed to make your program design operational
2) **Schedule:** proposed timeframe for implementation
3) **Program resource requirements:** human and non-human resources required for successful program implementation
4) **Budget:** the program's estimated cost
5) **Potential failure factors and preventive actions:** the factors that could, if not addressed, cause the program to fail or fall short of expectations, plus actions that should be taken to avoid or mitigate possible failure impacts
6) **Measurement strategy:** the approach for determining how well the program is being implemented and its effectiveness in meeting its goals.[xiv]

A rewards program begins and ends with asking ourselves what we want from it. To understand what failure looks like and what to measure for success, a set of expectations should be defined. DHRM quoted O.C. Tanner (2000) "What's most important in a recognition program?" in its Employee Recognition Program Handbook:[xv]

TO SENIOR MANAGEMENT:	TO EMPLOYEES:	TO MANAGERS OF PROGRAM:
Increases productivity	Satisfies recognition needs	Includes efficient administration
Produces Return On Investment (ROI)	Creates positive recognition experience	Excites employees
Improves attitudes	Provides a wide selection of attractive, personalized awards	Creates pride
Builds loyalty and commitment	Provides timeliness of recognition	Pleases management
Generates positive feedback	Guarantees quality of award	Involves all employees
Empowers the workforce	Fosters open communication of appreciation	Develops a partnership with the workforce
Assures efficiency		

Table 5

Measuring performance management effectiveness is not an $A^2+B^2=C^2$ type of equation. Human performance that is impacted by many factors, including motivation, should be evaluated taking those factors into account. The object is to ensure that what is measured as motivation and performance isn't really about something unseen. Figure 3 shows a model for considering the "big picture" of employee motivation and performance.
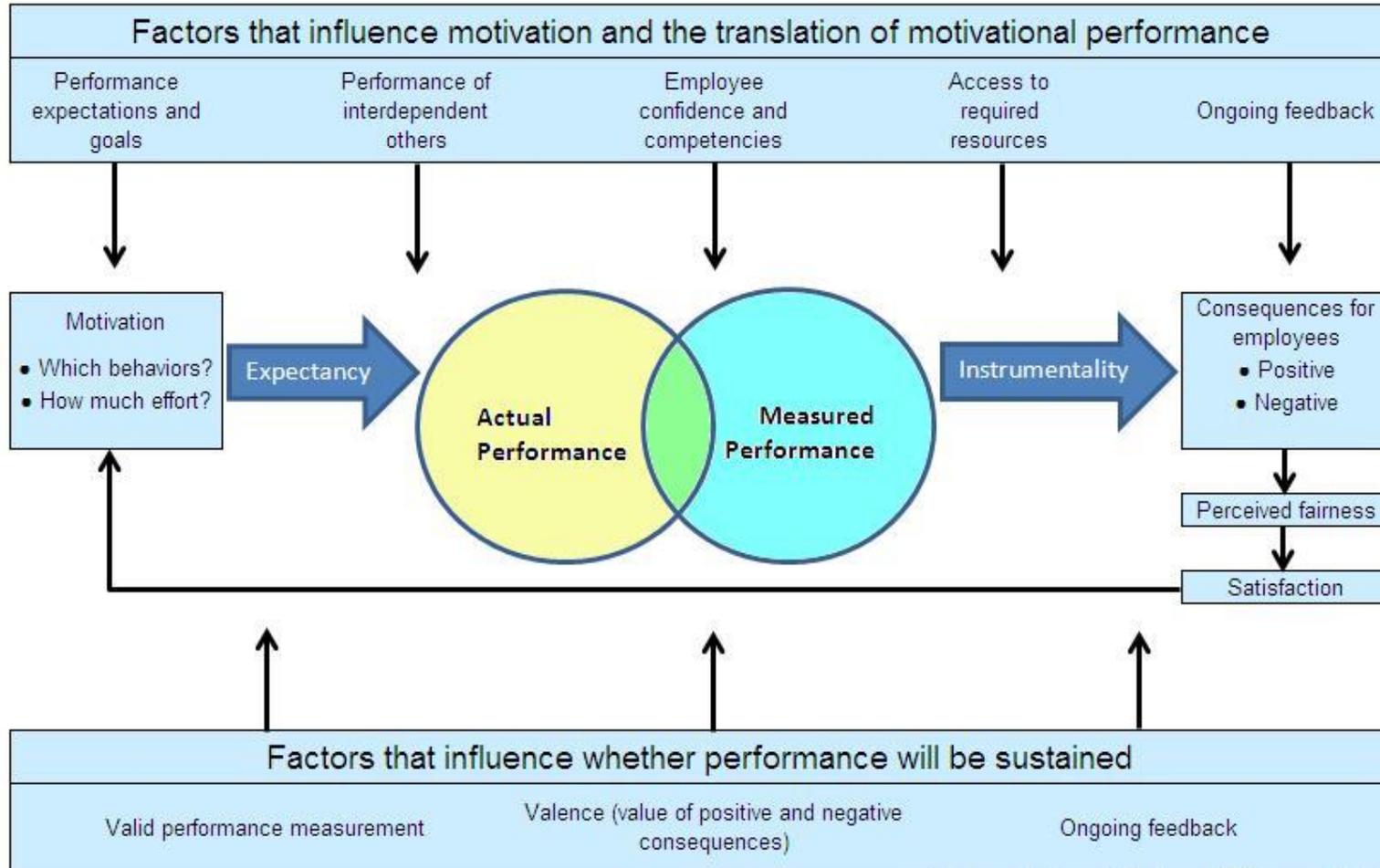
Figure 3

Expectancy means "If I make an effort, will I be able to perform as intended?"
Instrumentality means "What consequences, if any, will follow from my decision to perform?
Valence means "How much do I value the consequences associated with the intended behavior?"[xvi]

6) Breaking up is hard to do

Having ensured that all input factors are positive (see Figure 3) and that what we are reviewing is simply an employee's chosen behavior or performance capability, we can review the value of our work relationship and consider what, if any changes should be made.

Sometimes it just seems that we reach the end. Things change. People change. Relationships are affected by change. Just as with personal relationships, the employer-employee relationship should be regularly and objectively examined. We can ask:
- What is going wrong – what are we feeling?
- What we want that's different than what we have?
- What we can change to restore the relationship?
- What to do when breaking up seems like the only solution?

The decision to end a relationship is more often emotional than practical. That doesn't making an emotional decision is wrong. The decision's practical aspects are usually based on resources, but deciding not to live in misery can be practical too. When an employee stays in a dysfunctional job because he/she needs the current wages and/or benefits, we can argue that neither side is enjoying full profit from the employment.

However, we should avoid rushing to judgment if compromise would work. Practical approaches may help deal with unhappiness, such as:
- Flexible work hours or scheduled time off. Employees may be strained by caring for children, aging parents or both. When working from 9AM to 5PM isn't absolutely necessary, why can't we bend the schedule rules if it helps us both?
- Offer sabbaticals. The Ashland health Clinic in Kansas understands the challenges of recruiting doctors for rural medicine and has targeted candidates who are willing to "willing to sleep on a cot in the Amazon or treat earthquake victims in Haiti."[xvii] These "mission-focused" doctors are offered eight-week sabbaticals to keep making their mission trips and stay contented.
- "Responsible Restructuring" as opposed to downsizing (layoffs) that makes employees feel like commodities. Cascio cites indirect costs of layoffs that can wipe out the savings of culling labor to reduce costs:
  - Recruiting and employment costs of new hires
  - Low morale; risk-averse survivors
  - Increase in unemployment tax rate
  - Lack of staff when economy rebounds; training and retraining
  - Potential lawsuits from aggrieved employees
  - Heightened insecurity; reduced productivity
  - Loss of institutional memory and trust in management.[xviii]
  Cascio recommends strategic reassignments, open communication when restructuring is unavoidable and seeking employee input for cost savings that could help avoid losing intellectual capital through drastic staffing cuts.

Cascio's indirect costs can be hard to pinpoint and measure, but direct costs of workplace breakups are easy to identify *if* we set up an accounting system to identify them for reference.

The [Taming the Training Expense Monster](#) article explains how to categorize and calculate training costs for replacing employees who lose their loyalty and leave. The training costs can be entered in the Rework section of a [Quality Costs Calculator](#) along with costs for advertising, time for screening and interviewing applicants, interviews, moving expenses, pre-employment administrative expenses and medical exams.

When trying to address an employee relationship the pragmatic approach can help avoid impulsive mistakes or sending the wrong message to sensitive employees. I included a flowchart for the employee remediation process in my paper [When Employees Don't Follow Procedures](#). However, the flowchart does not detail counseling efforts among its suggestions for intervention to improve performance. Employees whose performance does not meet expectations should be consulted before counseled, and counseled before let go. Consultation can help identify organizational issues that are outside the employee's control, and counseling can pinpoint personal problems that distract, sap workplace energy and increase absenteeism as described in my [Arresting Absenteeism Costs](#) paper.

Cascio provides many examples of programs that help save the employers' reputation when cutting staff just cannot be avoided, including:
- Open communication to allow time for planning transition
- Sabbaticals
- Temporary "work share" assignments at other employers
- Resume writing and outplacement services.[xix]

When investing in our human resources even in hard times the reward can be greater attraction when the time to rehire comes. Just as with personal relationships, organizations can gain both good and bad reputations based on their behavior when times are hard. Keeping a good reputation can help shorten the time it takes to come back with a good recovery and move on.

Conclusion

The costs of getting our workplace relationships wrong are so diverse and vast that one would think managers would pay as much attention to them as we do to avoid making defective widgets. The truth is most employees are expected to self-regulate behavior with consequence of job loss as motivation to please. Managers get promoted from technical to leadership positions without being given even basic communications training to help avoid misunderstandings. Human Resource departments get shrunk on the basis of being sheer overhead (non-production) and the surviving members have little energy, time or support for developing programs that could generate substantial employee cost savings.

Managers are very often on their own to their department-level human resource challenges. There are sources available such as the [Free Management Library](#) (no affiliation) that can help Quality Assurance professionals apply the Plan-Do-Check-Act principles that serve so well for production and service. With competition squeezing us and employee costs constantly rising, there really is no time to waste.

End Notes

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[v] Ibid. (p. 20)

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[xviii] Cascio, Wayne F. Responsible Restructuring. 2002: San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers (pg. 4)

[xix] Ibid.