

MANAGING
A PROBLEM EMPLOYEE

A CREATIVE
APPROACH
TO DISCIPLINE

*The best way to handle a dispute,
an employee problem is to prevent it.*

*The next best is to use
a creative approach to discipline*

N.H. ATTHREYA

MMC SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT,
PUBLICATION DIVISION, BOMBAY

MANAGING A PROBLEM EMPLOYEE : THE POWER OF CREATIVE DISCIPLINE

With a Resource Guide

N. H. ATTHREYA

M M C SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
PUBLICATION DIVISION, BOMBAY

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND REVISED EDITION

This monograph has been out of print
and out of stock for several years now.
This is being republished
in response to several requests.
This is a revised edition;
new and recent material has been added.

We are losing millions of rupees and hours
both in the industrial and governmental sector
because of the conventional approaches.
We can ill afford such loss at this hour of history
especially when alternate methods are available.

Corrective and punitive methods
are certainly exciting.
Creative methods can be equally **exciting**,
once we become familiar
with the concept and the working.
Besides,, they can be satisfying.
Like friendship, familiarity does not happen;
we have to make it happen;
especially when it pays.
Who said manager is one who makes things happen?

Bombay

N.H.ATTHREYA

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

The best way to handle a dispute is to **prevent** one. One major way to **prevent** disputes generally is to practice realistic personnel administration. One aspect of personnel administration is a creative approach to discipline.

Since disputes often arise out of the way we handle a case of discipline, this aspect alone has been stressed in this monograph.

The suggested creative approach should work in many cases, but in some it may not.

When it does not, we have to take recourse to law.

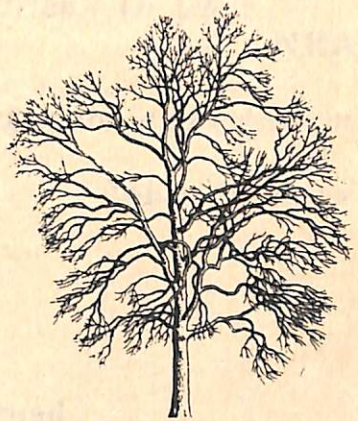
But, in the overall interests,

it is better not to rush to what law has in for us.

It is much better to tackle discipline as a human problem instead of a legal problem, to look at it in terms of **what is wrong** instead of **who is wrong**.

You know the procedural approach to disputes. We urge you to consider this **purposive approach** for the reason that we have found in our experience many work places converted into law courts, resulting in **loss of cash and goodwill**, yes, for want of such an approach.

This monograph is the first of a series of Occasional Papers. The aim of the Occasional Papers is to supply information, ideas, and points of view with a view to stimulate discussion, provoke argument and to provide subjects for further research and generally to focus attention on subjects which are, will be, or ought to be receiving the attention of the management as we move into the nineties and twenties.



Why This Unconventional Printing Format :

End to end, run-on printing we are all used to.

It has its value - it saves paper and cost.

For the Reader, more important than cost is the effort and the time.

Reading research shows

that reading comprehension is facilitated

when material is presented like this

in terms of thought units or whole phrases.

In places, such writing may sound poetic

but that is more a matter of substance and style.

I do not intend it to be free verse.

THE AUTHOR : N.H.ATTHREYA

Dr. ATTHREYA describes himself as "a student of overall wellbeing of individuals and organizations". A leading thinker, educator, professional problem solver and a concerned citizen, he has been editing a monthly, "Management Ideas" since 1963. His other interests include Human Excellence and Patanjali Yoga.



TREES, TREES, TREES.....

Our Artist has chosen trees to "illustrate" the text. He says: Trees mean different things to different people, for example, seed, soil, shade, strength, nature, nurture, leaves, flowers, fruits,

*All symbolise a beneficial **POWER.***

A CREATIVE APPROACH TO DISCIPLINE

*Take nothing on its looks. Take everything on evidence.
There's no better rule.*

Charles Dickens

*Fanaticism consists in redoubling your efforts when you
have forgotten your aim.*

George Santayana

*On the day he joined, his intention was pure and his
direction positive. What did the 'trick'? Or who?*

NHA

*Love without criticism brings stagnation and criticism
without love brings destruction.*

John Gardner

Problems of discipline
are an invisible loss
to an organisation.
They wear out the people concerned
and the concerned people are many.

It is no pleasure
to the supervisory personnel concerned.
Nor is it a pleasure
to the affected person,
nor his colleagues;
nor even the union leader,
if he is well-meaning.

Problems of discipline
mean more than discomfort.
They affect the tempo of work
because they affect the morale.



The attention of the many
is diverted to something
distinctly unproductive.
Valuable time and talent
of how many we don't know
is spent on each case of discipline.

Direct time spent on the case apart,
indirectly, time is spent
on this 'job'.

It will be revealing
to keep a record of the time
spent on disciplinary cases
and cash value thereof.

And what is the return?

**Often enough, it is bitterness or worse
and no more.**

As managers,
we are to turn every problem
into an opportunity.

Can we do so
in cases of discipline?
Probably we can do so
in most cases,
if we take **the creative approach.**

Often enough
a case of discipline arises
when the person makes a mistake -
a mistake in behaviour
or a mistake on the job -
when he deviates from the normal.



The conventional approach is
to establish who is wrong
and to 'take action' on him.

The creative approach says:

**ESTABLISH WHAT IS WRONG
AND FIX THE REMEDY.**

This is a difficult approach
in that it calls for a new attitude
and a new habit pattern.

When the mistakes are analysed
and quite objectively,
and with a view to finding a remedy,
we come across facts like these:

The man was **not** properly selected;
the man was **not** properly inducted;
the man was **not** trained for the job;
the man did **not** *get* on-the-job guidance;
the man did **not** have the right tool;
the man did **not** get the right supervision;
the man did **not** etc. etc.
ad infinitum.

It is *assumed* by everybody concerned
that the man would make up
for all these managerial lapses
by his ingenuity;
and thanks to the native ingenuity,
most people **do** make up for these lapses
most of the time.

Our quarrel is that
they do not make up *all the time* !



We say, if not in so many words
that the onus of knowing
what is normal in our organization
is on the man who takes an employment with us.

As we go down in the hierarchical line
we find mistakes increase
and with that cases of discipline.
One reason is that mistake
is an integral part of work, and workers work.
Shirkers don't make mistakes
because they don't do a thing.
And being a shirker is possible
only where we are supposed to work
with our head.
And that is at higher levels.
Perhaps because of the number involved,
we think less of punishment at higher levels
despite the consequences of lapses at higher levels.
*It is good to keep these facts in mind
when we analyse mistakes.*

An analysis will show
whether mistake is a mechanical error,
a process error or a human error,
Since discipline refers to human error,
we can find out how the error was caused.
It can be due to an error of judgment.
Since judgment varies from person to person
it can be due to a variation in judgment.

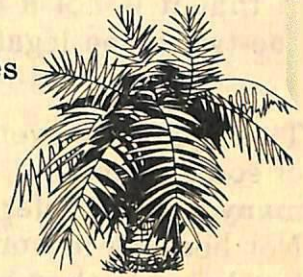
Or it can be due to other reasons.
The creative approach suggests
that we find out
the contributing cause or causes.



Having found out, we can correct
the current deviation
and take steps to prevent the cause or causes.
Our aim is to restore normalcy now
and maintain normalcy in future.

The mistake analysis
will bring to light, for example,
that there is no stated policy on certain matters,
and, if it is there, only a few know it.
In such a case we should spell out the policy
and make it known to the employee public.
True, in civic life, ignorance of law is no excuse
and the onus of knowing the law
is on the citizen.
In industry, fortunately,
it can be shared between employer and employee.
Industry is not in the legal business.

We are *not* referring to union relations.
We are here referring to cases of deviation
from the desirable or the normal,
where *individuals* are involved,
where there are *bona fide* mistakes
in day-to-day work.



We are not commending
a soft or sentimental approach.
On the contrary,
we are anxious
that we learn by mistakes – ours and others;
and that we capitalise on the mistakes.

Once we take the who-is-wrong-approach
it may give us some sort of sadistic satisfaction
that the culprit has been punished;
and it may justify our holier-than-thou attitude.

But it will *not* urge us to do the right thing and thereby prevent future mistakes.

On the other hand,
the creative approach,
the what-is-wrong approach,
will accept mistakes as part of work
and will concede that analysis will give out
not merely corrective steps
but preventive steps --
it will save us moving
from crisis to crisis.

**This approach has been tried
and found good
in some companies in India.**



Those who have tried point out:
It is hard in the beginning
in that it is not routine approach,
in that it is not a matter of
one-two-three legal steps.

This approach even goes against the grain
of some people;
many would prefer the punitive approach.
Not because it works
but because they are conditioned that way.

Once **this** approach becomes the company's pattern,
once most officers accept
the creative approach to discipline,
we find that the 'accused' and ourselves
together analyse the mistake.

This together-analysing
builds a sense of common purpose—
it makes clear
that the juniors and seniors
are not on opposite sides of the fence.
People bury less of their mistakes
and we also realise
that a mistake because it is noticed
does not become worse of a mistake.

We do know there *are* hard cases.
We do concede the possibility of sabotage cases.
The fact, however, remains
a large percentage of mistakes
comes under the *bona fide* category,
and not sabotage category.
Whether we take the conventional approach
or the creative approach
the time investment is about the same --
probably it is less in the case of the latter:
but in *the case of the creative approach*
the return is positive, productive.
Only it calls for a change of approach --
we should shift
from WHO IS WRONG
to WHAT IS WRONG,
from 'fix the blame' to 'find the remedy'.
One point needs restating:
this on-the-job-approach is commended
for handling **individual** cases
of deviation in performance or behaviour
because it works there.
Whether this approach will work
in handling groups or masses is
to us yet an unknown dimension.



FRESH INSIGHTS

Eric Berne on the one hand
and B.F. Skinner on the other
have provided in recent times
fresh insights
in regard to human behaviour.

Berne points out that
people have a 'stroke hunger' -
a hunger for strokes,
a hunger for attention,
a hunger for recognition.

Furthermore, he points out that
left to themselves,
people would prefer a positive stroke,
a pleasant attention.
If that is denied,
for whatever reason,
they would 'work for'
a negative stroke,
an unpleasant attention.
'Work for' because
they are responding
to an inner need for stroke;
they are not aware
they are resorting to a sick approach.

One of Berne's followers observes
that **what you get is what you stroke for.**
In other words,
if you give me attention,
for the violation of a rule,
written or unwritten,
I tend to do it more and more!



B.F. Skinner maintains
that behaviour
is a matter of reinforcement.
Through a series of empirical studies,
Skinner has proved that
using the reinforcement phenomenon
animals and birds
can be taught to learn,
and learn well,
even a complex behaviour.

When we relate these two
schools of psychology -
the transactional analysis school
and the behaviourism school -
to the work situation,
we get a few leads.



One is that we should
give balanced attention
to performance
and non-performance.
Giving attention to non-performance alone
indirectly encourages
non-performance;
for that way lies strokes,
and stroke-seeking behaviour is basic.

One may say this is sick behaviour.
This surely is.

What we need to remember is this.
When pressed by basic needs like hunger,
people 'prefer' the garbage heap to starvation.

Another is that we reinforce standard, positive behaviour at work by giving attention to it, by giving it approval, by giving it recognition.

As of now, in most places, this positive behaviour is taken for granted and no notice is given. **The indication clearly is that we demonstrate it, and often enough.**

When healthy food is made available, very few seek the garbage can.

Long term answers to problems of discipline do not lie in legal skill but skill in knowing man's nature and needs, and catering to them consistently. In simple operational language, let us notice and acknowledge people not only when they are **not doing** but when they are **doing**, and also for their **being**.



RESOURCE GUIDE : BOOKS

Author	TITLE	PUBLISHER	YEAR
BLUMBERG, STEPHEN	<i>Win Win Administration : How to Manage an Organization so Everybody Wins</i>	Thomas Horton and Daughters	1983
BRAMSON, ROBERT	<i>Coping with Difficult People</i>	Anchor Press	1981
BRUCE, WILLA	<i>Advanced Supervisory Practices</i>	International City Management Association	1990
CONDON, THOMAS	<i>"Fire Me & I'll Sue!" A Manager's Survival Guide to Employee Rights</i>	Alexander Hamilton Institute	1985
DELANEY, WILLIAM	<i>Thirty Most Common Problems In Management and How to Solve Them</i>	AMACOM	1982
GLASSER, WILLIAM	<i>Take Effective Control of Your Life</i>	Harper and Row	1985
GLASSER, WILLIAM	<i>The Identity Society</i>	Harper and Row	1975
HENEMAN III, HERBERT SCHWAB, et. al.	<i>Personnel/Human Resource Management</i>	Richard D. Irwin	1980
HUSE, EDGAR AND THOMAS CUMMINGS	<i>Organizational Development and Change</i>	West Publishing Co.	1985
JOHNSON, DAVID.W. AND FRANK P. JOHNSON	<i>Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills</i>	Prentice-Hall	1982

Author	TITLE	PUBLISHER	YEAR
KARRASS, CHESTER AND WILLIAM GLASSER	<i>Both Win Management</i>	Lippincott and Crowell	1980
KERRIGAN, JOHN AND JEFFREY LUKE	<i>Managing Training Strategies For Developing Countries</i>	Lynne Rienner Publishers	1987
KILMANN, RALPH	<i>Corporate Tragedies</i>	Praeger	1984
KOLB, DAVID	<i>Experiential Learning : Experience as the Source of Learning and Development</i>	Prentice-Hall	1984
LAWLER, EDWARD	"Reward Systems" in J.RICHARD HACKMAN AND J.LLOYD SUTTLE, eds. - <i>Improving Life At Work</i>	Goodyear Publishing Co.	1977
MASI, DALE	<i>Human Services in Industry</i>	Lexington Books	1982
MILES, J.B.	"How to Help Troubled Workers" in JOHN MATZER, JR., ed., <i>Personnel Practices for the 90's</i>	International Association of City Managers	1989
MITROFF, IAN AND RALPH KILMANN	<i>Corporate Tragedies</i>	Praeger	1984
SATHE, VIJAY	<i>Implications of Corporate Culture: A Managers Guide to Action</i>	Praeger	1984
TOSI, HENRY et. al.	<i>Managing Organization Behaviour</i>	Pitman	1986
TRICE, H.M AND PAUL ROMAN	<i>Spirits and Demons at Work</i>	Cornell University Press	1978

Please keep adding to this list from your rich experience

RESOURCE GUIDE : JOURNALS

The following are some of the journals (from other countries) that carry insightful articles on this and related topics from time to time. *You may add to the list from your own information.*

Academy of Management Review
Alcohol, Health & Research World
American Mental Health Counseling Association Journal
American Planning Association Journal
American Review of Public Administration
Association Management
Business Insurance
Editorial Research Reports
Employee Benefit Plan Review
Employee Relations Law Journal
Family Circle
Government Employee Relations Report
Harvard Business Review
Human Relations
Human Resource Management
Industrial Relations
Journal of Applied Psychology
Journal of Contemporary Business
Journal of Reality Therapy
Journal of the American Medical Association
Labor Law Journal
Management World
Modern Business Reports
Nations's Business
New Englander
Occupational Hazards
Occupational Health & Safety
Office
Omaha World Herald
Personnel Administrator
Personnel Guidance Journal
Personnel Management
Personnel Psychology
Public Administration Times
Supervision
The Journal of Corporation Law
The Labor Lawyer's Guide
Training



AN INVITATION to the READER

Over the years, I have observed that professionals in our country have much to tell from their experience. If they choose to tell, it can make a big difference for all of us. We can learn from successes and failures and that way go further and faster.

They may have good reasons to do what they are doing now.

As a professional consultant, I am duty bound not to divulge what the client considers confidential. Even when I write for a professional journal, I cannot give out specific details. The Reader may have similar constraints.

If however you do wish to share, if your company policy permits it, I invite you to write to me your significant experiences in anecdotal form.

Without your permission I assure you I'll not publish them. Even when I publish, I'll go by your preference. I can change names and places to ensure anonymity.

If writing is not your forte, you may talk on a tape or even face the video camera. Let your hindsight be many peoples' foresight.

I will be glad to acknowledge your contribution by name in the next edition. I will also send a copy of the new book which makes a reference to your contribution.

Warm regards :

P.O. Box 11269
Bombay 400 020

n. h. atthreya

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Sharing, as you know, is the essence of professionalism.

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