

Knowing What You Need And Getting It — Even In Lean Times

Paul Glover, President, The Glover Group

Back in the early 2000s, most of us in the industrial society felt that we lived in the land of plenty. The economy was growing businesses, and we felt we had unlimited resources. As a result, we didn't worry as much about waste.

Our world changed when the recession began in earnest. Since then, businesses have had a much more frugal attitude with an absolute need to control waste and thus increase profitability.

Unfortunately, this often means there is a prevalent attitude about trying to hoard limited resources — something upper levels of management must watch for. While you want to encourage an attitude of thrift and frugality, you don't want to encourage an attitude of stinginess. As an upper level or operational manager, you have to make sure that one department doesn't suffer because they don't have what they need to get the job done. Departments may compete to get more of their share of an annual budget, but a good manager makes sure that resources are appropriately doled out and appropriately used.

You may need to hone your influencing skills as you find a way to cooperate and coordinate with other managers to get the resources you need. People who are in control of resources are more likely to be persuaded when you can show:

- A plan that explains the concept of how the resources are being allocated.
- A stated goal that details the return on the investment.
- A time frame for using the resources and a time limit for goals to be met.

How do you know what resources you actually need? Many upper level managers make the mistake of assuming they know what is needed at the operational level when the people who are most knowledgeable about what is needed — as well as what is not needed — are the people who work on the front line.

Let me give you an example. I was doing consulting work for a manufacturer who made airplane parts, and certain parts had to go through an industrial hand grinder. But the handle size of the grinders was so small, the workers couldn't grip them properly and had adjusted by wrapping those handles in two and three rolls of duct tape. So you've got machines that have been jerry rigged so they may work, but they certainly aren't OSHA approved. I asked the foreman what was going on, and it turns out that someone in the front office made the purchase without consulting the people who would actually use the grinders.

Talk about a waste of resources. Not to mention what impact that has on the front

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line workers who feel that not only are they missing the necessary material, but that they — the ones who are truly doing the work to generate the company's profit — have to beg to get the resources they need to do the job.

The person who is going to control the waste is that front line worker who is doing the job. As a manager, you have to go to that front line worker and ask, “What do you need to do the job?” And he'll tell you right away the tools and the time that he needs to do the job. Sure, you have to trust that he is telling you the truth and that he is accurate about what he needs. But after all, why would you continue to keep him employed if you can't trust his judgment and work ethic?

You need to believe that your workforce wants to do the best job possible — that they want to do the work and that they care about the work. As long as you have employees who are in control of the resources they need to accomplish the job, they will care more about the job. But if you keep giving them what you think they need instead of what they actually need, don't expect them to be grateful and don't expect them to care.

In today's reality of limited resources, the best managers and companies find a way to get their employees what they need in order to do the job. What's more, by encouraging cooperation between departments and ensuring that your employees have what they truly need to be successful, you create an environment where your employees care about increasing effectiveness and decreasing waste as much as you do.

About Paul:

In 1992, after a thirty-year career as a labor/employment law attorney and union leader, Paul Glover founded The Glover Group, a management consulting firm dedicated to assisting companies survive the WorkQuake of the Knowledge Economy by improving workplace performance. Paul has a bachelor of Arts in English from DePaul University, a Masters of Labor Law from Chicago Kent Law School, and a Juris Doctorate Degree from DePaul University's College of Law. Paul is a FastCompany expert blogger who teaches Leadership Theory, Assessing Leadership Skills, Communication Skills for Managers, Team Building, Critical Thinking and Employment Law at Lewis University, National Louis University and the University of St. Francis.

With his distinctive, direct and oft-humorous approach, “recovering attorney” and long-time business and executive coach Paul Glover bares his knuckles to present 76 strategies and tips to thrive in the Knowledge Economy in his new book, [WorkQuake](#) [1], published by [Round Table Companies](#) [2]. This no-nonsense advice, gleaned from 25 years of helping businesses nationwide prosper, and his popular Bottom Line and Morning Mantra newsletters, carries you through the impact of the recent WorkQuake – the Industrial Economy's final meltdown. Twitter: [@WorkQuakeBook](#) [3].

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