

## Relationships Matter!

Management theorists like Frederick Taylor and Alfred Sloan promoted a cool, rational approach to management that has held sway for over 100 years. Taylor, the father of scientific management, was a mechanical engineer by training who sought to create efficient, machine-like workplaces. Alfred Sloan, another engineer-turned-theorist, wrote, “loneliness, distance and formality” are the CEO’s duty and in business you need to be “rational, not personal.”

I suggest a different approach—when working human beings, you need to be rational and personal because purely-rational workplaces disrespect human nature and throw sand into the motivational engine. This article explores the advantages of a more natural, relationship-based approach to management.

How do you treat your employees? Do you mentor and coach them and take pride in their accomplishments, or do you prefer to keep it impersonal and “businesslike.” There are many reasons why managers and supervisors might prefer cool, arms-length relationships in the workplace. Here are a few of the common ones:

- I may need to fire or discipline the employee, which would be difficult if we were buddies,
- If I take a personal interest in the lives of my employees, I might be accused of favoritism,
- My company discourages friendships with employees for legal reasons,
- What if I get burned and my employees are uninterested in forming a relationship with me and reject my overtures,
- If the employee leaves for another job, my investment in the relationship is wasted.

In addition to these logical reasons, here is one related to our biology—research indicates that the human mind can only process around 200 meaningful relationships. Researchers plotted primate group size versus primate brain size and made a startling discovery—group size and brain size are linearly related. When human beings are plotted on this graph, our predicted average group size is around 200. Beyond this number, the theory contends, we don’t have the brain power to keep track.

This may explain why human beings are so commitment-averse and why starting a relationship feels like so much work. I, for one, get a bit queasy when I contemplate a personal commitment, as if my brain is warning me to think-twice before investing.

### The Other Side of the Coin

As you might have guessed, this is not the whole story. There is another side to this coin—namely the benefits that come with deep interpersonal relationships in the workplace. I’ve been studying human motivation for 30 years, and I’ve concluded that Western societies are emotionally dyslexic or emotionally disabled. Ever since the writings of Frederick Taylor and Alfred Sloan, business schools have taught us to put cool, dispassionate rationality on a pedestal, and ignore the emotional engine humming

at the core of human nature. My contrarian conclusion—impersonal management is a gargantuan, costly mistake.

There are two trends in the business community that give me hope for a more emotionally-balanced and productive future: Dan Goleman, starting with his 1995 book, “Emotional Intelligence,” made it acceptable to utter the word “emotion” in a business context; and, more recently, the consulting community has convinced corporations worldwide that emotionally-engaged employees are a highly-desirable business asset that correlates strongly with financial success. Each consulting firm defines “engagement” somewhat differently, but a statistical study of the various employee-engagement surveys by the Conference Board in New York concluded that “engagement” boils down to an emotional connection between employee and employer and between the employees themselves. I agree with this definition, but, sadly, such connections are uncommon since only 20% of employees report that they invest in relationships at work (Gallup).

Gallup Organization has eight million employee surveys in its worldwide database. Each survey in the database consists of numerous individual questions. The Gallup Organization continuously mines this vast database looking for meaningful correlations between survey responses and hard business outcomes, like improved profitability. What question do you think best correlates with tangible organizational outcomes? The answer is startling from a traditional management perspective but not from an emotional-intelligence perspective—“Do you have a vital friend at work?”

This finding is perfectly reasonable if we look at human beings as a social species that has survived for millions of years by hunting and gathering in small, intimate bands. Employees strive not only for monetary pay, but also to be esteemed and respected by the tribe. The never-ending quest for self esteem, I suggest, is the ultimate form of currency that drives the behavior of both our employees and our customers. Without a true social group, however, companies don’t have access to this crucial motivational driver.

### **Connecting the Marbles**

Corporations today rely less on relationships to motivate employees and more on rules, regulations, money, and fear-of-being-fired. In other words, most corporations are not true social groups. Rather, they are pseudo-groups held together by artificial systems of control. This is not an encouraging trend considering that corporations are populated with Homo Sapiens.

I use the following metaphor to describe artificial groups in my book, *Primal Management*. Imagine a glass full of marbles. Now imagine flipping the glass over so the marbles are trapped inside. The glass represents the artificial systems of control that characterize most companies and the marbles represent the employees and managers trapped inside. Since there is nothing fundamental holding the employees together in this scenario, lifting the glass would cause the marbles to scatter. The downside to this sort of artificial organization is low productivity, high turnover rates, high absenteeism, reduced innovation and high levels of interpersonal friction and infighting.

Now let's start over with a fresh glass of marbles. This time, however, we are going to establish authentic, committed relationships between the marbles beforehand. These relationships act like glue, so when we lift the glass, the marbles don't scatter—they stay together and continue to function in a coordinated and unified fashion the way nature intended. I call this sort of natural organization a superorganism—a group of human beings who think and act as one. Which type of organization would you rather work for, the natural one held together by authentic relationships or the artificial one held together by money, systems and fear?

Human beings, I suggest, are built to be self-managing, self-organizing and self-motivated without the need for a thick rule book or an army of overseers when they are embedded within committed and tightly-bonded workgroups. Companies that recreate this sort of natural, low-bureaucracy, low-oversight ecosystem, unleash human potential instead of stifling it. Companies that follow my advice can convert a rag-tag collection of squabbling individuals into a powerful superorganism that dominates the marketplace.

### **Cathexis—The Most Important Word You've Never Heard Of**

If you accept my reasoning thus far, the million dollar question becomes—"How does one create emotional connections between employees and managers and between the employees themselves? Psychiatrists coined the term "cathexis" to refer to the emotional-bonding process. Cathexis is the biologic process underlying relationships of all types.

Parents cathect with their children, for example, by virtue of the enormous time and effort invested in raising them. Once a cathected bond is created, the child, for all intent and purposes, becomes part of the parents—part of their identity. Once a cathected bond is in place, the child's defeats are experienced as the parent's defeats and the child's successes are experienced as the parent's successes. In a very real sense, the parent and child are one.

The cathexis process does not only operate between parents and children. Anything can be brought inside by freely investing effort—even our employees. The investment-tracking mechanism responsible for this mysterious process is housed in the ventromedial prefrontal lobes. If this brain area is damaged, as it was in many lobotomy operations, human beings no longer care about their social investments, and do not react with anger if their investments are threatened. I call this brain area "the vault" that stores our valuable social investments.

It is not hard, in principle, to create cathected relationships. All managers need to do is: (1) value their employees, (2) commit to their employees, (3) invest in their employees, and (4) be willing to go to bat for their employees. In other words, we need to take personal responsibility for the health and welfare of our corporate tribes. These four steps are absolutely necessary to becoming a consensus leader and creating a positive dynamic in the workplace.

If managers aren't willing to do these things, then I cannot help them. They are stuck with what they've got—a motivational engine firing on just a few cylinders. If managers cannot commit, then they shouldn't expect their employees to commit either.

Something almost magical happens when managers overcome their inherent fear of commitment and sincerely invest in their employees. Employees subconsciously detect this commitment and investment and begin to commit and invest in return. This is the first step to becoming a consensus leader and creating a workplace full of engaged, productive employees.

### **Commitment and Fear**

As I mentioned earlier, human beings instinctively fear commitment. The brain automatically steers us away from it because we can only process 200, or so, relationships. Considering that we spend half of our waking lives at work, however, it makes sense to allocate half of our relationships to the workplace. When managers commit and invest, employees become merged with the manager's personal sense of identity. The manager's life becomes richer because the accomplishments of employees are experienced as the manager's personal accomplishments. Instead of experiencing cool detachment in the workplace, managers experience the warmth that comes with honest and meaningful relationships. Such managers would not deceive or harm employees, because it would feel like they were harming themselves.

I received an e-mail some years ago from a gentleman named Bob Carpenter who had found an early version of *Primal Management* on my website and decided to contact me. I subsequently spoke with him about his fascinating experiences turning around struggling companies all over the world. Here is my recollection of our first conversation:

“Paul, I've been a corporate turnaround artist for twenty-five years in thirteen countries and I've always been successful. I used a formula similar to the one you recommend in *Primal Management*. Most of my assignments were in Third World countries where employees had been terribly mistreated.

The employees hated their managers, and they initially hated me. It took four months, on average, but I always turned things around by showing respect for the local culture, by attending their ceremonies, and by developing the human potential of each and every employee. At first they would resist and try to provoke me. They figured I was just another gringo trying to take advantage of them.

If I stayed on course, however, things would eventually change and change suddenly. One day, out of the blue, instead of addressing me as Mr. Carpenter, they began calling me “Don Roberto.” The prefix “Don” followed by one's given name is a sign of respect reserved for village elders. As soon as they started calling me Don Roberto, productivity improved rapidly. It was an all-or-nothing sort of thing.”

Bob Carpenter’s story has an important moral—it is not easy to create trusting relationships. You’ve got to be in it for the long haul—four months at a minimum. When the motivational horsepower finally changes, it will happen suddenly after months of concerted effort.

I think all managers should follow Bob Carpenter’s lead. We will know we are succeeding when employees begin referring to us as Don \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in your first name)!

### **Cost/Benefit Analysis**

Carpenter’s approach may seem like far too much work. Before we reach this conclusion, however, let’s consider the benefits in our cost/benefit analysis.

Developing relationships requires an up-front investment, but that investment will yield huge dividends in the long run. Catected employees will want to please you so they don't need to be micro-managed. Catected employees are self managing and self motivated, so you can take that long-awaited vacation without worrying about things blowing up during your absence. Did I mention that you will be much more successful than a traditional manager because your employees will want you to succeed.

In conclusion, any workplace that encourages interpersonal commitment and investment can achieve something miraculous: a united tribe in which each person is psychologically bonded to the group and one another. The personal approach encourages everyone to volunteer their best efforts, which is precisely what we need to survive in a turbulent, global-economy. The extreme opposite is a hierarchical machine-like workplace, dominated by fear, where no voluntary investment occurs. This sort of workplace is inhabited by warring clans who battle one another for resources—hardly a recipe for sustained financial returns.

### **About the Author**

You can learn more about Paul Herr and his book, *Primal Management: Unraveling the Secrets of Human Nature to Drive High Performance*, by visiting [www.primalmanagement.com](http://www.primalmanagement.com).

If you’d like to test-drive Herr’s motivation-management tool, The Horsepower System™, enter the following URL into your browser and enter “guest” for the username and password.

<http://horsepowermetric.com/demo.php>

If you’d like to contact Mr. Herr, visit [www.paulherrconsulting.com](http://www.paulherrconsulting.com) or give him a call at 608-833-9446.