It’s Ultimately All About Our People

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In this edition of *CFMA Building Profits* that focuses on human resources (HR), I would be remiss if I did not address what is arguably one of the most important duties we have as construction financial managers (CFMs): ensuring that our people are properly motivated, encouraged, and supported.

While CFMs wear many hats – accountant, strategist, IT professional, etc. – the role of managing and leading our people is critical to the success of our companies. It is also a process that we sometimes overcomplicate with platitudes and superficial “manager speak.” So how can we address this?

Effectively managing people is all about being honest and genuine. I am reminded of all that I learned as a young man growing up in a rural environment that would ultimately apply to my life as an adult. (Of course, at the time, I had no idea of the impact!) Let me share one such story.

My grandfather sold cattle and would often sell on “credit.” I put credit in quotes because he didn’t really consider them as credit sales.

Many of his customers were poor farmers or only had temporary work and did not always have enough funds readily available to finalize the purchase. However, my grandad always accommodated these people, allowing them to take the animals and pay him later.

When I asked him why he was not concerned that someone might take an animal without ever paying, his response was a great life lesson. He told me that he knew and trusted his customers, and that there was more to life than contracts, agreements, and exchanging money at the time of the sale.

When someone looked him in the eye and shook his hand, he said he knew that the person would pay him. Imagine the confidence and trust that resulted!

At the time, I thought the entire situation was odd, but over the years I have reflected on it often and am reminded of the power of its simplicity and trust.

Too often, we overcomplicate the simple gesture of trusting our people. We justify that it is easier to complete a task ourselves rather than taking the time to delegate and allow our employees the opportunity to deliver the project.

Sure, it might take longer and most likely will require some trial and error. However, it’s like my grandfather taught me: Trust people and give them a chance to deliver. Although trust has inherent risks, the benefits far outweigh them.

You might be thinking, “This all sounds good, but am I really qualified to be a HR professional?”

Given our accounting and finance backgrounds,
we may often feel that we do not have the best disposition to manage people effectively.

To the contrary, my experience – especially during my years in CFMA – is that the most passionate, caring leaders in our industry can be found within our Association.

Why is this important? In those moments when you feel that you do not have the right response to an HR issue, use your CFMA resources – your local chapter members, your national connections, the Connection Café, and many others. I have found these resources to be invaluable in my career.

Leading and developing people is an art – it takes a special skill set to deliver on our obligation to our companies and our people. I challenge you to take the time to regularly give feedback to your staff. It does not have to be formal or even documented; just be yourself. Share your expectations and how your employees will be a part of your company’s success. Use the resources available through CFMA and elsewhere when you need help or guidance.

Most of all, take the advice of my grandfather. There is more to our working lives than the formality of the day-to-day. Look your people in the eye, let them know that you trust them, and empower them to take on more responsibility.

Whether it’s selling cattle or leading others, it is really about trusting people and giving them the opportunity to grow and develop.

It is amazing what we can all accomplish together!