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Responsibilities of Management

Modern managers often utter cliches about wanting employees to "think outside the box," to take risks and to be creative. And while I'm sure companies do appreciate breakthrough innovative ideas that increase profits, productivity or quality, the fact is that most organizations are inhospitable to those who challenge old ways of doing things, even practices that are inefficient, useless or counterproductive.

I've talked before about the obligation of employees to pursue excellence. Well, managers have an equal if not greater duty to establish an atmosphere where employees are truly expected and willing to think and act in the best interests of the company and its customers.

According to Josephson Institute surveys, between one-fourth and one-third of all employees say there's a "kill the messenger" tradition where they work and that it is common to distort or conceal negative information or tailor data to give managers what they want to hear.

A sure sign that management hasn't done enough to promote candor is when a manager asks, "Why didn't someone tell me?" Companies must find ways to more effectively send the message that mission-oriented employees who produce and demand quality are to be prized, not penalized.

I've come to believe there's never just one incompetent or unaccountable employee. There are at least two: the employee and the manager who keeps him employed.

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