

The Collector Chronicle

North American Recovery

April 2024

America's Collection Authority

LAST MONTH'S LUCKY WINNER

The lucky winner of our client prize for March is Neumont College of Computer Science. They have been using our agency since 2019! We will be sending them a gift basket from Harry and David's. Enjoy!



THIS MONTH'S PRIZE

This month we will be giving away a gift basket from the Chocolate Covered Wagon. Each client who sends new accounts during the month of April will have their name entered into a drawing. At the end of the month, we'll draw a name, and if it's yours, you'll win the gift basket!

*Don't miss out on your chance to win!
Send new accounts before the
end of the month!
Good luck!!*



**CHOCOLATE
COVERED
WAGON**

Mindset

By: David J. Saxton

President, North American Recovery

I remember the first time I was promoted to a "management" position. I was working as a cook at Hardee's. I'd been there for about three weeks when the manager pulled me aside and asked if I'd like to take the position of "Head Cook." "Heck yes I would!" was my reply. I was 17 years old, and this was my second "official" job. I'd of course mowed lawns and done various odd jobs as a kid to earn pocket money. My first official job was at Diamond Lil's as a dishwasher and eventually a busser. I got that first job when I was fifteen and a half, so I did have some experience in the working world. But my first "management" position? Head Cook! I was excited.

However, I had no idea what I was in for. Turns out I was by far the youngest member of the crew. The two cooks I worked with were both men, one was 23 years old, 6 foot, 2 inches tall, and had about 60 pounds on me. (I was 5' 9" and weighed 145 pounds wet.) The other cook was in his mid-forties. I quickly discovered that the 23-year-old was not at all happy that I received the promotion. He'd been there a year and was gunning for the Head Cook Position. He didn't want to be taking orders from some 17-year-old. The guy in his 40's couldn't care less.

Turns out that the cute girl working the front counter—who I'd been flirting with for the past three weeks—was actually the 23-year-old's girlfriend. I found out when he stopped me in the parking lot after my first shift as Head Cook and told me he was going to beat me up, which he would have had an easy time of. I somehow talked



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my way out of a beating and kept my head down for the next several days at work. I didn't tell anyone what to do, I said as little as I could, and as you can imagine, I quickly found another job. My first management position didn't turn out to be what I thought. But I learned some valuable lessons.

First, don't flirt with your co-workers. Keep it professional. Romance in the workplace just complicates things. Second, when you're the new guy, and the youngest, make sure you show the proper respect for your elders. I already knew this, because my parents did a good job of raising me to be respectful, but my first management experience confirmed their guidance.

While my title wasn't much more than that, just a title, the people I worked with resented my age and thought I had no business being in "management." This was a scenario I would regularly encounter during my career. I had to learn very quickly to be diplomatic and give respect to my elders when I was put in a position of authority.

This was even more important when I started my own business at the ripe old age of 23. Everyone I was hiring for the next ten years was older than me, so this first lesson I learned flipping burgers turned out to be invaluable. Now that I'm on the other side, and the oldest employee in the company, I understand how daunting it can be for a new manager. Knowing this, I go to great lengths to help ease a new manager into the wonderful world of management.

Unfortunately, I didn't always do this. Confession time: in my early years, I didn't provide any training for a new manager. I would promote a high-performing employee into a junior

management position, and say, "Get after it." Typing that now makes me cringe a little. And think of how absurd that was, but youth, and inexperience, sometimes generate illogical scenarios.

I knew better. I've always known that the skill set needed to be a top producing employee was dramatically different from those needed to be a great manager. Even though I knew better, I threw my new managers to the wolves, and, as you can imagine, without the necessary training and mentoring, I lost good people. It was 100% my fault. I eventually figured it out, and created the robust, detailed, and intensive New Manager Training Program I'm going to talk about in this article.

My management trainee program has evolved over the years and will most certainly continue to do so. The name's not very original, but it works. We call it "The Management Trainee Program." It made me laugh to see that in writing. Anyway, it's based on reading and discussing the book *The First Time Manager*. The *First-Time Manager* (harpercollinsleadership.com). It's kind of like a book club. In fact, it gets nicknamed "Book Club" every time we run it. So, in reality, it is a book club. We hold daily meetings where we discuss a chapter we've all just read. In these meetings, we review the concepts and ideas in the chapter and compare them to what we do when we're dealing with those types of issues. Most of the time, we are in agreement with the book. But sometimes we do things a little differently. Either way, it's a great way to shed light on the why of our management model.

One benefit we didn't foresee was the way these meetings help validate our management



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The Collector Chronicle

North American Recovery

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America's Collection Authority

techniques and methods. Most of our managers started with our company in an entry-level position and worked their way up. They already know how we manage, because they've already been managed by us. Once they start participating in the book club, they have several "Ah-Ha!" moments. And when we finally finish the book, they have an excellent understanding of the why from top to bottom. It helps them be better managers because they are completely bought in, they believe in what we do, and why we do things the way we do, and they are fully engaged. We call a team member that's reached this level of dedication and loyalty a true NARNian.

I wanted to touch on a few concepts we discuss. The first one is what this article is named: Mindset. There is a distinct difference between "Employee" thinking, and "Manager" thinking. Neither way of thinking is inherently good or bad, they both serve a very important purpose, and are both critical to the success of a company. But they are different. For example, an employee comes to work and says, "I'm here, tell me what my job is and how to do it." And that's exactly what we want from an employee—at least in the beginning. But more on that later. A Manager comes to work and says, "Okay, what do I need to do so that our employees can do their jobs without any frustrations or distractions?" Two very different ways of thinking about your job.

As I said earlier, both ways of thinking are important, and each is equally respected, but learning to think in the Manager Mindset, when you've been operating under the Employee Mindset for several years, can be challenging for new managers. As senior managers, we keep this in mind, and gently, and kindly, point it out when a

new manager slips back into their old way of thinking.

Another concept we teach to a new manager is what happens when they miss work. An employee simply calls out and that's it. They don't have to worry about who's going to cover their work or how it's going to affect the company. That's not their job, it's their manager's job to worry about that. We make sure our new managers understand that when they aren't going to make it into the office on a given day, they need to coordinate with other managers in order to make sure that their duties are still carried out in their absence.

Our managers also realize that even when they have a day off, they still need to be attentive and answer calls from the office. We teach our managers that saying, "Oh, we need to wait until such and such manager is back in the office before we can deal with this issue." is not how we operate. Our standard is if the office is open and team members are working, we don't wait. We call the manager who's not here, get the answer we need, then move forward with dealing with the issue.

The last thing I wanted to touch on in this article, is something I alluded to earlier. I said that when a new employee starts working with us, we want them to ask what their job is, and how they should do it. Which is true. We have a unique collection model that's served us well for over 30 years. We've learned a thing or two and we know what works. It's important for their success, and the continued success of the company, that they perform their jobs the NAR way.

However, we also love change. We want to continually get better. Stay on the cutting edge. Keep up with the times—if not lead them. In order



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promote this, we have a “Good Idea Bonus” incentive. If an employee thinks of a better way of doing things, we pay them. Ten dollars, twenty-five dollars, fifty dollars, sometimes more.

In order to further encourage this type of thinking, we tell new employees that if they don't understand why we're doing something, ask. Bring it up. It either has to make sense or we need to step back and see if we should change things. If someone answers the “why” question with, “That's just the way we've always done it.” Or “That's just the way things are done around here.” We cringe. Literally. Phrases like that aren't tolerated and are considered blasphemy. Seems a bit extreme, but let me tell you why I'm so adamant about it.

The last job I had before starting my own company was working for one of the biggest and oldest collection agencies in the state. This company had over 100 employees spread across three offices, one in Salt Lake, one in Ogden, and one in Provo. I was the collection supervisor for the Salt Lake office. I had 12 collectors as my direct reports.

When I was promoted to this position, I was of course the youngest member of the team, so my experience at Hardee's was a blessing. Anyway, as I started to get into the weeds of my job, I began to identify things we needed to tweak and improve. Things we could automate. Processes and procedures we could streamline. Things that would reduce frustration and improve efficiency.

I would regularly take these ideas and pitch them to my boss. He would reply with, “You know, that would be expensive to implement, and it would take a lot of work, and, we've been doing things the way we have for the past 30 years, and they've been working for us, so I think we'll just stick with the way we've been doing things.” After hearing this for about six months, I decided I was

going to start my own agency and implement the good ideas I'd come up with for my own company.

The collection agency I last worked for went out of business about ten years after I left. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying I had anything to do with their success or failure, but I wholeheartedly believe their resistance to change contributed to their demise, as unfortunate as that is.

That experience cemented my belief in constant change. Not just change for the sake of change, but changing to get better. I've been adamant over the past 30 years that we constantly analyze what we're doing, can we do it better, and if we can, then let's make a change.

I want to make sure we keep going for another 30 years or more. Careful, meaningful, mentoring of the next generation of managers, and creating a culture of change, while constantly asking for and encouraging the young, fresh minds to share their good ideas, are some of the ways we can ensure that we do.

Thanks for reading. Have a great month.

— Dave



The Collector Chronicle is published monthly by NORTH AMERICAN RECOVERY for prospective and current clients. Please direct questions or comments to the editor, Dave Saxton, at DaveSaxton@North-American-Recovery.com.

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