

THE DONALD COOPER CORPORATION

Speaking and coaching internationally on management, marketing and profitability



Management tool #A-12:©

Problems on the ‘Front Line’ are almost always a symptom of problems further up in the business.

What happens on your ‘front line’ has a huge impact on your bottom line. But, when things go wrong on the front lines, it’s almost always a symptom of problems further up in the organization. And, sadly, it’s always easier to blame and discipline the front-line folks than it is to look for and deal with the real problem further up the line...especially if we’re the problem.

In over 20 years of coaching businesses around the world, I’ve found that the management failures and shortcomings listed below cause most of the front-line problems in any business. Which ones are at work in your business...and what will you do about it? **Put an X beside the ones that apply to you.**

Keep in mind that the ‘front line’ is not just where we interact with our customers. There is a ‘front line’ in the accounting department, in manufacturing, in the warehouse...and in every other part of the business.

Note: This project requires a high degree of self-awareness and a great deal of personal courage to see and admit to what is really preventing your front-line people from doing their job wonderfully. Then, it will also require some considerable wisdom in knowing how to fix what needs fixing and persistence in implementing and following up.

Our ‘front-line’ problems are most likely caused by one or more of the following:

- 1. Lack of clear expectations, indecision, mixed messages or conflict at the top.**

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

- 2. A lack of urgency or caring at the top.**

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

3. Toxic leadership style at the top.

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

4. Toxic, incompetent or lazy middle management.

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

5. Micro-managing from the top or the middle management.

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

- 6. Management not having the ability, desire or courage to hire people with the right mix of talent, knowledge, experience, ethics, personality and drive needed in every part of their business?

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

- 7. A negative, unfair, unethical or toxic culture that makes top-performers leave and mediocre performers stay and take '*I don't give a damn pills*'.

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

- 8. Poor communication.

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

- 9. Not investing in the systems & processes required to deliver efficient, consistent and extraordinary outcomes on the front-line.**

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

- 10. Lack of training and empowerment.**

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

- 11. Lack of acknowledgement, rewards, celebrations and 'hugs'.**

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

- 12. Management's failure to deal with non-performance. 'Bad apples' are allowed to stay and pollute the entire group.**

Discussion, conclusion and commitment to act:

Final Note: Many businesses actually set up their front-line employees to fail through one or more of these 12 shortcomings. How does your business rate and what will you do to fix what needs fixing? Involve some of the smartest and most courageous people on your Team in this important conversation. Encourage them to be frank and open in their comments. Listen intently and calmly. 'Thank' them for their insight, courage and honesty. Implement and follow up.

Donald Cooper, MBA, CSP, HoF, has been both a world-class manufacturer and an award-winning fashion retailer. Now, as a Toronto-based international management speaker and coach, he helps business owners and managers to rethink, refocus and re-energize their business to sell more, manage smarter, grow their bottom line...and have a life.

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