



Activity – Role Play: Insurance Company

Focusing the Problem

An effective leader knows that decisions receive better acceptance when employees are involved. To discuss and resolve a problem, the leader must be able to: stay focused on one problem; present the problem in situational terms rather than behavioural terms; not imply an immediate solution; and express in terms of mutual interest.

Process

1. The instructor asks Helen Farr to state the problem to the group, keeping preliminaries to a bare minimum.
2. After a little interaction, the instructor asks the clerks what they like, or do not like, about the approach.
3. Try again, or use one of the observers, to try an approach. Three examples are sufficient.

General Instructions

Helen Farr is the manager of one office unit in a large insurance company. Her unit serves to make available various kinds of information kept there in large files. Other units in the company call her office for information and data and the office clerks must refer to their records in order to answer these requests. This means that the office has many phone contracts with several other units of the company. There are three clerks in charge of particular information, but although they all have phones on their desks, there is only one line.



Facilitator Notes:

Role Descriptions Activity – Role Play: Insurance Company

Helen Farr

You are the supervisor of an office unit in an insurance company. The group you supervise is made up of three women clerks who work at their desks. The work involves telephone contacts with company people who require information that the various clerks have in their files. Since all the phones are on one line, the clerk who answers uses a buzzer signal to request that the person with the required information take over the call. You never answer the phone unless one of the clerks informs you by buzzer that the call is for you. The clerk with the least service answers the phone and buzzes the person who can handle the phone call.

A relief period of fifteen minutes, both morning and afternoon, is given to the staff and this is regarded as adequate for their personal needs. You have asked them to take their breaks one at a time in order to keep the office covered. When the work is heavy, they frequently skip their breaks. Your boss has complained that you are hard to reach by phone because the line is always busy. He says that he can reach other units that do the same type of work and he thinks that your group is making too many personal calls. You know that the clerks do call freely and receive quite a number of personal calls. You told your boss you would do something about it and you have decided to talk it over with the group first. It is time for the meeting and the three clerks have arrived in your office.

Amy Shear

You are very conscientious and seldom go out for coffee during the relief period to which you are entitled. Instead, you stay at your desk and work or make personal telephone calls. Some of your co-workers, especially Farah, receive and make calls on company time, but you do not feel this is right. Lately another co-worker, Anna, has been getting a lot of calls from a new boyfriend.



Farah Rowe

You consider yourself very efficient and perhaps do more work than the others. You have a three-year-old boy whom you leave with your mother while you are at work. She lives two blocks from where you live. You frequently call your son during office hours and sometimes your mother calls you at the office. You enjoy your work and stay with the company even though you could make more money somewhere else. You have a job where you can easily be reached by phone.

Anna Kline

You like your present job because the hours are good and your boss is not too strict when you are late. You go out nights and sometimes oversleep, but you make up for this by missing your relief time and working harder. You seldom use the phone for personal business as others do, especially Farah. Lately, one of your boyfriends has been pestering you with phone calls. You do not know how he got your number, but this has been embarrassing because your boss noticed you talking with him. This worries you, but what can you do when someone calls you?

Instructions for Observers

1. Make notes on the way in which the leader states the problem. She may state the problem in behavioural terms - the boss has complained, some people are abusing the rules or she may use situational terms - how can we improve service during busy periods - what constitutes a justifiable personal call?
2. Did the office group understand the statement of the problem?
3. Was the leader's approach direct?
4. Keep a list of the type of reactions to the way the problem was presented.
5. Note the following: Was the leader permissive or receptive? Did all the members have their say? Were there defensive reactions? Were there disagreements between the clerks and the leader?
6. Evaluate the approach: Did the relationship improve? Was the problem solved?