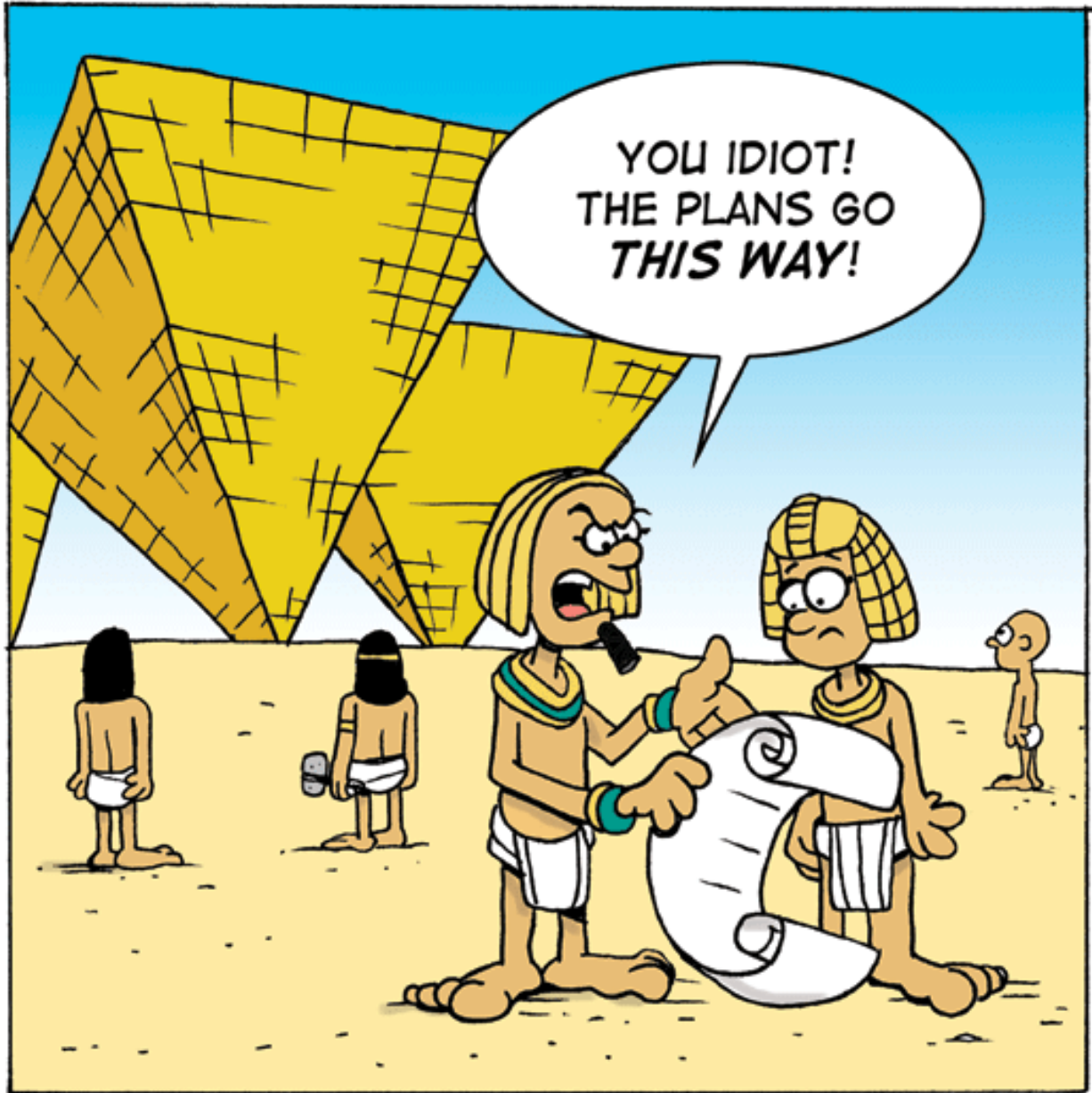


Was this an employee problem or an employer problem?



SPLUDCOMICS.COM

© 2010 LONNIE EASTERLING

A restaurant in my neighborhood opens at 5:00 p.m. for dinner. Recently, when I arrived around 5:15, I was the only customer. I seated myself in a booth. The waitpersons were huddled together, talking and laughing. They didn't even know I was there. I decided to wait silently until one of them noticed me. I waited 10 minutes.

In another recent incident, I took my grandson to an outdoor pool at a local country club. Kids were swimming; parents were sunbathing. I noticed that the young lifeguards were all huddled around one lifeguard station, laughing and "hanging out," as teenagers are prone to do. The problem was, they weren't doing their job, which was to diligently watch for swimmers in distress.

In both instances, I was initially upset at the employees. They were derelict in their duties. Their job was to serve customers but instead, they were focused on each other.

Upon further reflection, I realized that fundamentally, this was not an *employee* problem, it was a *managerial* problem. Why hadn't supervisors properly trained these employees? Why weren't managers

monitoring real-time performance and correcting deviations from standards?

Leaders/managers, that's part of your job.

One reason why I love to spend time on a cruise ship is that the employees are well managed. Every employee is attentive, works hard, on-time, and serves with a good attitude. Performance standards are set and enforced. (I heard that on one cruise, when a waiter insulted a passenger, at the next ports-of-call he was put off the ship and sent home.)

When reasonable expectations are clearly set and fairly enforced, employees feel valued, secure, and productive. And customers are satisfied.

I also embrace the value of individual initiative and effort. In the previous scenarios (inattentive waiters, distracted lifeguards) each employee could have, and should have, broken off from the pack and done the right thing. (Those individuals are rare; look for them and value them.) But ultimately, the well-being of an organization is determined by the leader.

Leaders/managers, that's part of your job.