

CASE 4.1

A Drill Sergeant at First

Mark Young is the head of the painting department in a large hospital; 20 union employees report to him. Before coming on board at the hospital, he had worked as an independent contractor. At the hospital, he took a position that was newly created because the hospital believed change was needed in how painting services were provided.

Upon beginning his job, Mark did a 4-month analysis of the direct and indirect costs of painting services. His findings supported the perceptions of his administrators that painting services were inefficient and costly. As a result, Mark completely reorganized the department, designed a new scheduling procedure, and redefined the expected standards of performance.

Mark says that when he started out in his new job he was “all task,” like a drill sergeant who didn’t seek any input from his subordinates. From Mark’s point of view, the hospital environment did not leave much room for errors, so he needed to be strict about getting painters to do a good job within the constraints of the hospital environment.

As time went along, Mark relaxed his style and was less demanding. He delegated some responsibilities to two crew leaders who reported to him, but he always stayed in close touch with each of the employees. On a weekly basis, Mark was known to take small groups of workers to the local sports bar for burgers on the house. He loved to banter with the employees and could take it as well as dish it out.

Mark is very proud of his department. He says he always wanted to be a coach, and that’s how he feels about running his department. He enjoys working with people; in particular, he says he likes to see the glint in their eyes when they realize that they’ve done a good job and they have done it on their own.

Because of Mark’s leadership, the painting department has improved substantially and is now seen by workers in other departments as the most productive department in hospital maintenance. Painting services received a customer rating of 92%, which is the highest of any service in the hospital.

Questions

1. From the behavioral perspective, how would you describe Mark’s leadership?
2. How did his behavior change over time?
3. In general, do you think he is more task oriented or more relationship oriented?
4. What score do you think he would get on Blake and Mouton’s grid?