Banish BBB![1]

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This Timely Tip is not an argument against bureaucracy.

It is a caution against **BBB**—***Big Bad Bureaucracy***. Allow me to explain.

Today's systems of management, supervision, and control utilize bureaucracies as a way of rationally coordinating the duties and responsibilities of people in an organization, from top managers to front line employees. *Ideally*, it is a system of administration that systematically distributes labor with a structure of authority and processes designed to get work done in a routine and productive manner.

All well and good.

Until the system evolves into a complex, procedural, red tape nightmare for both employees and customers. Then, it becomes ***Big Bad Bureaucracy!*** And that happens all too often.

Following are a few samples of the negative effects on employees and customers, as well as some suggested "fixes" or actions that could be effective in banishing **BBB**.

BBB and Organizational Functioning

As employees, we all know **BBB** when we see it. Following are just a few of the many observations I've made working with organizations over the years:
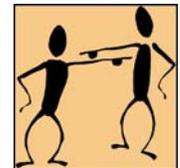
- In very bureaucratic organizations, emphasis is placed on the importance of top management, often resulting in a top-heavy organization at the expense of operating units.
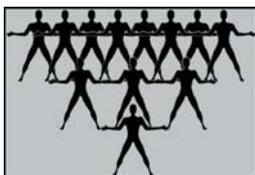
  Top managers become driven by organizational politics and a concern for maintaining their power. They hoard information and use it mostly as a basis for preserving or gaining their power. They often use it to make themselves look better in the eyes of others and describe their performance as better than it really is.

  The greater and more complex the management structure, the less often managers communicate with front line employees. And, the more often they have very little awareness of the realities of the front line employee work environment.

- Given the power of management, employees see protecting themselves as more important than achieving the organizational mission. They don't take responsibility for mistakes and failures. They blame others to keep themselves in a good light with management. They live in fear of their managers, distrusting them and not respecting them. They frequently feel they are being treated as a grade-school child—as a clog in a machine, at best.

- Complex organizational structures lead to department managers protecting their own departments, budgets, and people, often at the expense of achieving the organization's mission. As a result, employees frequently spend their time protecting their department's turf and departments fail to effectively communicate and cooperate with one another. Intra-organizational Teamwork is nonexistent.

BBB and Customer Relations

Not only employees suffer from the effects of **BBB**. Customers suffer, too. In fact, in some ways, this is even more important, because a steady stream of customers is what keeps a business going. Here are just a few examples I've collected over my years of surveying customers or facilitating customer focus groups:

♦ Just like employees, customers often find themselves wrapped in the red tape of set policies, rigid procedures, and mounds of paperwork. They frequently find themselves dealing with a system that seems to be set up for the convenience of the organization at the expense of a good customer experience. Customers don't feel cared for. They often complain that they are treated more like "numbers" than individuals

They see barrier after barrier put in their way when they attempt to resolve an unsatisfactory purchase or service experience. They see the organization as so inflexible that it does not appear to have the capability of adjusting to their individual situation when they are having a problem. "No exceptions" seems to be the rigid rule.

♦ In these days of voice messages and telephone menus impersonally delivered to customers when they try and reach someone to help them, customers become frustrated. The become very impatient while navigating through a main menu and then submenu after submenu, only to reach the wrong person or to receive a recorded "how to" message instead. Talking to a live human being seems to be almost or completely impossible in many organizations.

Banish BBB

It all boils down to your organizational culture. If you create a winner-take-all, bottom-line-is-more-important-than-anything-else kind of culture, you will have an untrusting, disrespectful culture in which employees don't acknowledge any mistakes, protect their own turfs, and put their own survival above achieving the organizational mission and satisfying customers. Customers who, in fact, are the reason for the organization's existence. A culture in which teamwork and effective communication are nonexistent.

Big Bad Bureaucracy *thrives* on that kind of culture!

To banish **BBB**, it is imperative that you take several steps to change it:

Step One: Reduce layers of management and facilitate more effective communication between managers and front-line employees. Managers need to be fully aware of the problems faced by employees on the front lines.[2]

Step Two: Involve *everyone* at every level in aligning themselves to the organizational Mission. Not just a plaque on the wall. Really bring the Mission to life by tying it to everyday work behaviors.[3]

Step Three: Give employees at every level more decision-making power by focusing on objectives. Focus on what you want them to accomplish, rather than how they should get there. In other words, *empower* them.[4]

Step Four: Build organization-wide teamwork. Emphasize this: An organization in which everyone is working together produces a symphonic experience for every customer.[5]

Step Five: Cultivate a customer-driven mindset throughout the organization. Start this process by focusing on every person in the organization as an *internal customer* to someone else, emphasizing the key role that each plays in providing customers with high quality products and/or services.[6]

FOLLOW THE FIVE STEPS!

CHANGE FROM THIS:

THE SATISFACTION LEVEL OF EMPLOYEES AND CUSTOMERS
Outstanding ☐
Poor ✔

TO THIS:

THE SATISFACTION LEVEL OF EMPLOYEES AND CUSTOMERS
Outstanding ✔
Poor ☐

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[2] See http://www.arniedahlke.com/090930-See_The_Big_Picture_From_The_Inside.pdf for more thoughts about this step.

[3] See http://www.arniedahlke.com/100915_Breathe_Life_Into_Your_Mission_Statement.pdf for a more detailed description of this step.

[4] See http://www.arniedahlke.com/090715_Harness_The_Power_Of_Empowerment.pdf for a more detailed description of this step.

[5] See http://www.arniedahlke.com/100715_What_Does_The_Word_Team_Really_Mean.pdf

Also see the following Timely Tips: *090525* , *100831, 101031,* and *101115* listed on http://www.arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm

[6] See http://www.arniedahlke.com/100519_Develop_A_Customer-Driven_Mindset.pdf for a more detailed description of this step.