

# The Four Commandments

by

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American industry is in constant pursuit of the new path to success. In the 80s and 90s they chased quality via quality circles, just in time, statistical process control, continuous improvement, TQM, reengineering, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Some of these efforts contributed to the improved performance of the American workplace. But they did not turn out to be the miracle bridge to the Promised Land or the secret to Dreams-Come-True. Why not?

There may be something is missing. While most of the technology, even in some ways quality circles, concentrated on “things,” the missing piece seems to have been “people.” The people component is based on the fundamental laws underlying healthy, productive relationships between employer and employees—whether the “employee” is the CEO, a first-line supervisor, receptionist, or engineer.

In this decade, we worked with a company that, among other things, described itself as excellent at the manufacturing process, but poor at including people in the planning and operation of the business. They wanted to get better and were searching for the way to do it.

We suggested that they consider beginning the search by adopting The Four Commandments. (We chose that title to get people's attention.) These commandments are a result of what thousands of employees in this country have described to us as the fundamental laws of the relationship of between and among people in a workplace that is world class. Without these commandments in place, no amount of technology, process improvement, or training will put you on the permanent winner's list.

Here are the commandments:

1. *Tell the truth.* No lying, shading or withholding. Say it as you know it, when you know it.
2. *Do what you say you are going to do.* People have had far too much of the "they don't walk the talk" descriptions of their leaders.
3. *Do your job as well as you can and as well as it needs to be done to become the best you can be.* This two-part law means you have to have the potential and you have to exercise that potential to its fullest.
4. *Treat people right.* We are tempted to cite the Golden Rule, but fear that many of us treat others as we have been or are willing to be treated. That's not good enough. If you are not willing or able to treat people right—that doesn't mean give them what they want all the time, but rather demonstrate values of dignity, respect, and caring—even when those are not reciprocated—then you fall short of the mark. Treating people right does not advocate extreme permissiveness. Tough love is as much a part of treating people right as is the other practices mentioned. What we do has to be good for the people and good for the business.

There you have it. These commandments are not the secret to success, but rather the prerequisite to it. If this is not a description of you as leader and your organization, then save yourself the time and money of buying the latest miracle program "drug." It is likely only to mask the symptoms, not cure the illness.