

BECOMING A BETTER MANAGER--A TRIBUTE TO JUAN ALVAREZ

By Dr. Debra Holland

Last Wednesday, a 24 year-old man named Juan Alvarez was killed in a car accident, along with his 16 year-old brother. They crashed into a stalled car on the freeway, causing their car to explode. This happened only a few days before their sister's wedding.

Juan worked as an engineering supervisor at a small Marriott Hotel in Costa Mesa, California. He was a very popular employee, and I was called in to do grief counseling for his stricken co-workers. In so doing, I came to know a wonderful young man--a loving son and brother, a caring co-worker, and an exemplary manager.

Have you ever stopped to think about the legacy you'd leave with your fellow employees if you were to die suddenly? For most people, this idea never crosses their minds. But I want you to think about it now. How would you be remembered? How would you be mourned? Would your company and your staff wonder if you could ever be replaced, not only because you did the important tasks of your job, but because you were an effective and caring manager or co-worker?

When I conducted the supervisors' group at the hotel, I heard about how helpful and supportive Juan Alvarez had been to his peers. He often mentored his fellow managers, encouraging them to come to him with problems, and helping them find ways to work them out. They knew they could always count on Juan to be there for them.

Later, as I sat in a group with his men, all Hispanic, all older than Juan, I heard their stories about their relationship with him. They described him as a son, or a brother, not just a boss. In listening to their stories, and watching strong men sob with grief, I realized Juan exemplified the qualities of a good supervisor. This young man had intuitively learned how to be a good boss to his men and a caring mentor to other managers in the hotel.

I realized that sharing about Juan's natural management skills would be an excellent example for other supervisors and a good way to honor his memory, insuring that his death wasn't in vain. Juan demonstrated the following four important management qualities:

1. Listen to your employees.

Over and over, I heard people tell me how Juan took the time to listen to them. Often managers are too rushed to listen to their employees. Other

supervisors don't care enough to make the effort. This can lead to poor policies and decisions being made by the manager due to lack of feedback. Also the employees can make mistakes because they don't understand their responsibilities or lack proper training in how to do their job. Employees who don't feel listened to, especially if they have important feedback for the manager, become resentful, discouraged, and disgruntled.

2. Value their wisdom.

Juan didn't take the attitude, so common with managers, that he knew the best and only way to do things. He realized that his men had a lot of experience and knowledge about their jobs and about the company. Not only would he listen to what they had to say, he often sought their opinion about what they knew or thought, and then implemented their suggestions.

3. Give them respect.

Juan knew he had good employees. He let them know he respected them by listening to them and valuing their wisdom. He allowed them the autonomy to do their job without micromanaging them and acknowledged them when they did well. He communicated any necessary correction or discipline in a direct and affirming way.

4. Show caring.

During lunch and at breaks, Juan would ask questions about the men and their families and encourage them to share about themselves. He'd also share a bit about his personal life. He'd work with his employees to find ways to handle any of their personal problems.

Because of the way he managed his men, Juan had an effective, efficient, and close-knit team. Shouldn't that be the goal of every supervisor?

Juan is no longer here to be with his family, friends, and co-workers. But YOU are and his legacy lives on in you. Live today in the fullest. Be your best self with your family, friends, and co-workers.

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