Eight Tactics for a High-Performance Enterprise

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It isn't complicated: Valuing employees and "doing the right thing" lead to exceptional performance.

It's no secret that the workforce and the nature of work itself are changing rapidly. Many businesses, particularly large ones, cannot adjust. If an organization is not actively promoting and integrating the following eight guidelines, that organization is already behind and will be negatively affected as the workforce shrinks and traditional management practices continue.

The roots of the problem are traditional management practices and HR policies created to catch "bad apples". Start with the premise that most employees, say 95%, are good people. That leaves 5% who are bad apples. Often this 5% occupies a much larger share of managers' time and attention. To try and rid the organization of these people, policies are instituted that effectively penalize or insult the majority. When treated the same as the 5%, the 95% feel embarrassed and de-valued. Worse, the policies establish a bureaucratic system that makes it nearly impossible to get rid of those whom they were established to address.

These eight tactics will shape a clear and common-sense policy:

1. Positive assumptions about people

Dealing with the 5% — employees that lie, give minimal effort, and avoid responsibility — will taint your assumptions about people, and encourage a desire to micromanage everyone. Evidence of this is seen when managers restrict access to specific areas (rooms, cabinets and tool cribs) for some team members; accept performance 'minimums' rather than 'maximums'; guard information; and avoid self-management. It becomes irrational for employees to feel valued, and so the organization receives compliance, not commitment.

Leading with positive assumptions about the quality and integrity of the majority of the workforce promotes pride, passion, and accountability.

2. Identification and elimination of negatives

Anything that minimizes, rather than maximizes a person's feeling of value to the organization is a "negative." Many of these are almost invisible to the people who can eliminate them, e.g.: providing water or coffee, but not for all; reserving parking for executives; punitive policies for some but not all; differences in holiday and vacation schedules; late performance appraisals and wage increases, etc.

Most of these negatives are easy to eliminate. Put yourself in the shoes of their hourly-paid employees to recognize them.

3. Mutual trust and respect

Progress toward mutual trust and respect can be made by doing the first two elements. And, if a business wants to be able to unlock supplies and equipment and treat people as responsible adults, there must be recognition that there probably will be some theft and deceit until the 5% are gone. However, they will have created a high trust environment for the rest. In addition, create the standard that trust is a requisite attribute in order to receive a job offer. Clearly communicate trust as a core value and treat any violation of trust as a dischargeable offense.

4. Two-way communication

Share information, be open, and avoid secrets. Speak to everyone at every level as you would a neighbor you like. Remember that people, regardless of the work they do, have the same desire for involvement and respect as managers and senior leaders do.

5. Employee engagement

Experts in organizational development predict the end of hierarchies. If it can be agreed that the people doing jobs know those jobs the best, why aren't leaders empowering employees to solve problems and create continuous improvement in every organization?

6. Training

Investing in training reflects value for people and a clear belief that good people only get better and produce greater results with an investment in their development. Manufacturing companies often have a substantial budget for preventative maintenance on equipment, but limit the necessary dollars to maintain each person's potential capacity.

7. Competitive wages and benefits

In a high-performance culture, the objective is to make wages and benefits a "non-issue". If people are challenged, valued and fairly compensated, they are reluctant to take another job for more money. Fairness is perceived and achieved by regularly checking the market value for all jobs and paying competitively (around and somewhat above the market midpoint), sharing the survey data if someone is interested and being transparent about ranges and the compensation structure. If a company is providing competitive pay and benefits, there shouldn't be any mystery around this topic.

8. High expectations

Write job profiles that set high expectations for the results, versus the tasks involved. Replace that phrase, "All other duties as assigned" with "Proactively support the team and company in

achieving its objectives." Now, the person who waits to be told what to do is no longer meeting the minimum.

When business leaders don't set high expectations for their employees, they shouldn't be surprised that average results are achieved. High expectations give people a purpose for their work, and valuing employees leads to exceptional performances.

Sue Bingham is the founder of the HPWP Group and author of the bestselling book, "Creating the High-Performance Work Place: It's Not Complicated to Develop a Culture of Commitment." She is a proponent of the "positive business" movement, and designs common-sense systems that make people and organizations more effective. Learn more at www.HPWPGroup.com.