

Workplace Needs Winning People Strategies

By Kevin Kennemer, SPHR

As a CEO, business leader or entrepreneur, are you looking for a distinctive competitive advantage over your competition? Can you recruit valuable talent with minimal effort and retain your people once they are on the team? Is your workforce energized and productive - with bottom line results to prove it? A common thread running through long-term, viable organizations consistently earning a profit for their shareholders year after year is their determination to treat employees with trust and respect.

An energized and positive team-based work environment is not developed by accident. A winning people strategy requires an honest, sincere commitment and participation from the CEO and her leadership team to create this force of nature. The following are a few winning people strategies to move your company from merely a going business concern to an energized and wildly profitable enterprise.

CEO as People Practice Champion – When the CEO champions the cause for excellent people practices, the probability of organizational success is much greater. With the right leader, a workplace built on trust and respect will endure positive and negative economic conditions. Companies cannot buy the admiration of employees; it is earned over time through the actions of truthful, ethical and savvy business leaders.

Show Sincere Appreciation – A winning people strategy is to show sincere appreciation to employees for a job well done. Simply being thanked for completing a project or praised in front of peers are basic human needs that go unmet in most workplaces today. Today's employees feel over-worked and under-recognized. The recognition can occur in the form of a handwritten note or team luncheon paid by the company. Showing recognition does not have to be expensive, but feeling appreciated is priceless.

We Are Family – Not only was "We Are Family" the theme song of the 1979 World Series Champion Pittsburgh Pirates, it should be every company's mantra today. You have permission to treat your employees like family. It is nonsense for leaders to worry they will get too close to someone at work. Conservative corporate think has made us believe we cannot truly care for those we work with most of our waking hours. When employees see their business associates as family members – people who truly care for their wellbeing – they will go the extra mile and will be far less likely to leave the company.

Stop Unnecessary Stress – We all know stress is a normal part of life. A certain amount of stress should be expected. Unnecessary "stupid" stress, however, created by poor management practices, organizational politics, etc., stifles productivity and should be avoided at all costs. Mindlessly repetitive or unorganized meetings create unnecessary stress. Artificial deadlines that cause people to jump through hoops to complete tasks only to wait days or weeks for approvals create unnecessary stress. Think before you make people jump.

Allow Employees to Disconnect - The pervasive use of 24/7 technology has created a certain amount of connectivity stress. Even when employees go home they are typically plugged into the office by mobile devices or home computers. Certain organizations have an expectation for employees to be available all hours of the day and night. The Associated Press recently reported that many mobile phone addicts – crackberries - have reported phantom vibrations on their side where their phone is normally holstered, even when the device is not there. Our bodies have become so accustomed to the vibration of phone calls

and email, we vibrate even when we are not wearing a phone. When your body starts vibrating without a device, something is terribly wrong.

Enforce the No Jerk Rule - Jerks are destructive to your physical health and the bottom line. Even if the jerk is a rainmaker or considered highly valuable, get rid of him/her. Period. Jerks bury themselves inside the organization and slither their way up the corporate ladder leaving an enormous body count during their ascent. How do they survive? Jerks massage the egos of their superiors while terrorizing and instilling fear among their subordinates. Don't be fooled. Their bi-polar management techniques will eventually get your company in trouble. Jerks are like bunny rabbits; they quickly multiply by hiring people just like them who soon will overtake your organization. A growing number of high performing organizations are adopting no-jerk policies.

HR Does Not Create Culture – A common misperception is the human resources team creates the company culture. Actually, corporate culture trickles down from the top, depending on the behavior and personality of the CEO and her leaders. A few years ago a headhunter called to recruit me for a vice president of human resources position. The recruiter stated the company needed a dynamic people person to create a great work environment because the CEO was very rude and routinely yelled and cursed at people. I kindly passed on the offer and explained that a human resource team would not be able to change the culture if the company's CEO was Scrooge on steroids. Incidentally, that company filed for bankruptcy a few years later and is no longer in business.

There are many other people practice strategies to consider. There is not one magic formula or one clever program a company can follow. Each organization has its own personality and must follow their individual path to greatness. The road to greatness, however, starts with a sincere concern for employees.

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