

HUMANEMENT

HIGH-PURPOSE...HIGH-PERFORMANCE

By Mark Brenner



There's an old parable that goes like this: Three stonemasons were busy at work when a passerby asked each of them, "What are you doing?" The first stonemason responded, "Laying bricks." The second answered, "Earning a living." But the third mason said, "We're building a cathedral."

The third fellow was a bricklayer with a vision ... and more. He understood the greater purpose of the effort and recognized that this enterprise of which he was an integral part was going to leave a lasting legacy. In short, he was working "on-purpose." What if you could have employees like that, people who can imagine, dream and envision a greater purpose and then live it in their day-to-day work?

Last month's column in this year-long series on the "people value chain" (i.e., talent attraction, targeted recruiting, high-accuracy hiring, proactive onboarding, talent identification, performance enhancement, career acceleration and succession management) spelled out what every career-minded person seeks from his or her work life and described, at a strategic level, some of the levers leaders can operate to produce engaged employees who are more committed to their enterprise, their customers and their team. This time, we'll bring the discussion closer to the ground with specific tips and tools for leaders who recognize the dramatic difference on-purpose employees can make.

Get Off to the Right Start

Employees approach their work with either of two vastly different mindsets: to punch the clock or to make a meaningful contribution. The psychic rewards associated with the second orientation are critical for a person to thrive and to reach his potential. So, how can management create a culture that nurtures the second mindset?

Let's begin by acknowledging what the endgame is for any high-performance enterprise. Two quotes drive the point home. Wayne Calloway, when he was the CEO of PepsiCo, said, "We have 120,000 employees stashed in various places around the world, and I frankly have no idea what the hell they're doing." Echoing this same viewpoint, Sam Walton put it this way, "The bigger we get as a company, the more important it becomes to shift responsibility and authority toward the very front lines, toward the department manager who's stocking our shelves and talking to our customers."

What both are saying – one metaphorically and one explicitly – is that each and every employee must understand – both strategically and tactically – how to make the highest and best contribution to the company's success and growth. Now, this is a very tall order. However, it makes perfect sense because, in the end, it's your people – individually and collectively – who deliver customer delight, productivity, innovation, quality, profitability and growth. So, get them engaged, empower them and then cut them loose to "deliver the goods."

The platform from which this seemingly magical solution evolves is a strategy infused culture. If a leadership team finds the courage and the creativity to build a strategic platform that is imaginative, passionate, inspiring and intrepidly bold, and then cascades it throughout the enterprise, the organization has a better than even chance of being able to engage and empower its work force.

Lead 'em Right

Back in the 18th century, Goethe said, "Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them become what they're capable of becoming." In the latter part of the 20th century, Olympic gold medalist Carl Lewis said, "Scientists have proven that it's impossible to long-jump 30 feet, but I don't listen to that kind of talk. Thoughts like that have a way of sinking down to your feet."

Just about all employees, even those who are just “making a living” today, very much want to be invited to be part of a viscerally meaningful calling. Fundamentally, creating meaning in this way for people is about two things: telling and sticking to a captivating story (i.e., the strategy), and then serving as a 24/7 role model for the principles, benchmarks, prescriptions and expectations spelled out by the strategy (i.e., leadership). Both Goethe and Lewis, then, are making a statement about leadership: “Lead ‘em right,” and “Think high-performance thoughts.”

LQ, Not IQ

Many executives get too hung up on the importance of “smarts,” “brains” or “intelligence.” If managers are truly focused on the endgame, then they will quickly recognize leadership is really not about IQ. Rather, it’s about displaying leadership, stimulating team intelligence and executing; in short, “LQ.” Leadership quotient is vastly more critical to driving an organization toward its vision than is IQ. In fact, IQ is highly overrated. It’s not at all uncommon to see stuffy, intellectual executives who stifle the brainstorming process. LQ is where the action is.

Here is a closer look at the contributors of leadership potency: Tool #1: Set monster goals – First of all, the troops expect true leaders to set monster goals. When Jack Welch led GE, he said, “Stretch thinking means using dreams to set business targets – with no real idea of how to get there. If you know how to get there, it’s not a stretch target.” Monster goals must pervade the culture and be crystal clear, compelling, bold and energizing.

Tool #2: Stay highly involved – Achieving monster goals requires that leaders cascade information, knowledge, authority and rewards to the lowest possible level in the organization. Furthermore, make teams the basic building block of organizational structure. Build high-speed communication channels. Use an aggressive performance enhancement process and support each person’s self-directed development. Then, collaborate across disciplines. These are the characteristics that mark a high-involvement culture.

Tool #3: Maximize feedback – Leaders also need to be effectively introspective; continuously ask the tough questions; institutionalize feedback, build multiple feedback channels and gather multi-directional feedback; default to and embrace candor; and air it out – anything and everything.

Tool #4: Embrace change – Let go of old ways that are no longer as effective as they once were. Include everyone in the transformation process. Dial in to the specific needs – conduct continual gap analyses to spot opportunities to enhance a process, system or solution. Do something – anything. As always, be out in front, leading the (change) charge.

Tool #5: Lead – Be a role model 24/7. That means operating in accordance with the principles and expectations set forth in your strategic documents and organization’s leadership competency model. There’s tremendous potential leverage in a leader’s title and role, so capitalize on it, but use it with humility. Your culture is the tie that binds, so be a culture keeper. Be an “obsessed” communicator. Nurture future leaders. Stretch yourself and the talent that surrounds you with challenging assignments.

As a leader, use these tools to create a cathedral-building atmosphere on a foundation of your core values, mission, vision and strategic execution blueprint. Together, these create the covenant, inspiration, compass and gyroscope that will align and supercharge each employee’s contribution to the enterprise. In the end, this is how to create a culture in which each employee spends each workday “on-purpose.”

The Vision Emerges

When you work with and observe people in such an empowering culture, you see them behaving like “owners.” It’s immediately apparent they identify highly with their organization and its mission. You also notice that both management and the work force treat the strategic documents like living text.

Finally, it becomes quite evident that the intrepidly bold objectives that are interwoven throughout these documents do not intimidate them but, in fact, fire them up. They understand that they, together with their team of master craftsmen, are building the cathedral of their vision. **USBR**

Mark Brenner is chairman of the Global Consulting Partnership, a company that provides leadership development and organizational performance solutions for corporations, professional service firms, nonprofits and closely held businesses. For more information, visit www.tgcpinc.com or call 610-975-9110.