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Bring out the best

*Strengths-based approach
increases productivity*

Question:

“Employee morale is becoming a concern. Some of us remember a time (not so long ago) when employees seemed happy and enthusiastic when they came to work. Now, it seems that many of them are dragging in, moping around, going through the motions. Some of my colleagues got defensive and even upset when I asked the question, ‘What’s our role in employee morale?’ They seem to think that employee morale is not their concern – it’s something for the employees to take care of on their own. What’s your take?”

Answer:

As we continue to confront uncertainty and ambiguity in so many aspects of our lives, it is not surprising that employee morale is suffering in your (and many other) organizations. Employees are scared. Will I be the next one to lose my job? How much more belt-tightening can I endure? More is being asked of me, how much more do I have to offer? It’s so hard right now, when will it get easier? When will the pressure let up?

I am sure if they were honest, many of your managerial colleagues are feeling the same kinds of tensions as the employees. And, as managers, they are responsible for team and collective performance, so their burden is actually heavier, if you think about it. So, what is the morale of the managerial team? What impact does managerial morale have on employee morale?

Your managers are either avoiding reality or awfully naïve when they say they don’t believe they have a role in employee morale. Managers have a very powerful role in employee morale.

The lens of corporate culture is the perspective I adopt in analyzing these situations. Managers shape the corporate culture by what they say (or don’t say) and do (or don’t do). Managers have a great influ-

ence regarding the conditions of work that employees experience. What style of leadership pervades the organization? What are the organization’s compensation practices? What tools and resources are provided to employees? What are the communication practices? What values and beliefs are es-

poused? What behavioral norms have emerged? Perhaps most importantly, what assumptions do managers make about the brutal reality of your organization?

Research paints a consistent picture of the factors that correlate with job satisfaction among employees. A sense of accomplishment or pride in one’s work always ranks high on these lists. Being recognized, valued, and affirmed is important. Another factor is constructive challenge,

so that one makes further and further use of their gifts and talents.

Money and rewards, although important, tend not to be satisfiers, over the long term. If compensation is adequate, throwing more and more money at employees does not guarantee either greater productivity or greater satisfaction. On the other hand, under-compensation is almost certainly dissatisfying. So, the point is to make sure your compensation practices are fair and competitive.

To truly create an environment of job satisfaction, you must turn your attention to other considerations.

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like to do and make sure that they’re spending as much time as possible in these areas of strength. They will be more productive and happy. And, the managers for whom they work will be more productive and happy.

I know some of you are saying, “Sounds like hand holding . . . we don’t need more of this namby-pamby, ‘feel good’ stuff. We need people to stop whining and get back to work!” My hunch is some of the questioner’s colleagues fall into this line

of thinking. Well, my question to those of you who hold this mindset is, "How's that working for you?"

Now, consider the following according to a Gallup survey and various studies:

- » The No. 1 reason people leave their jobs is that they don't feel appreciated.
- » When employees work for years with bosses they don't like, their risk of coronary heart disease rose by 16 percent and their risk of stroke rose by 33 percent.
- » Negative employees can scare off every customer they speak with – for good!
- » Sixty-five percent of American workers report receiving no recognition in the workplace last year.
- » More than 90 percent of people say they are more productive when they're around positive people.
- » According to Nobel Prize-winning scientist Dr. Daniel Kahneman, we experience more than 20,000 individual "moments" in a waking day. As a manager, how do you help your employees experience their moments?
- » Psychologist Dr. John Gottman has documented that the ratio of positive to negative interactions is critical. The

"magic ratio" is 5:1. Less than 3:1 is too little. Greater than 13:1 is too much.

- » A study undertaken at the Mayo Clinic examined patients over a 30-year period and found that those who experienced more positive emotions lived on average about 10 years longer.
- » Positive emotions are not trivial luxuries ... they are critical necessities for optimal functioning!

So, do you really want to help your employees experience greater satisfaction at work? The prescription is to find out who your employees truly are. What are their hopes, dreams, and aspirations? What kind of work do they love to do? Engage in a little discovery of this kind and then turn them loose! Along the way, take time to let them know you that you are aware of their efforts and that you think they are "sensational!"

Maybe you will see some gains in satisfaction ... and in productivity. ■

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