

Articles for Managers

The Other Way...

Beyond Technology to Leverage Your Investment in Your People

by Ian Cook



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“Our people are the key to our success?” How so very often we have heard executives mouth these words. But then, how very often we have also heard their people mutter words such as, “Oh yeah, well, if we really *are* the key, how come *they* don’t ...” Of course, it is true. In this increasingly competitive, knowledgebased and customer-driven economy your people are absolutely vital to how your enterprise performs. After all, pretty well everything that is done in your organization is done between and through people.

Yet, it never ceases to amaze me why management powers-that-be don’t devote more effort to accessing *all* the talent that they have paid for. There is such a phenomenal additional return to be generated if they only would.

“Our people are the key to our success?”

I am going to assume you are not like “them.” I am assuming you do want to access some of that rich untapped potential contribution of your employees. How do you go about it? Well, you have essentially two ways.

The first is through what most companies the world over are rushing to do—leverage employee production through technology. It’s no surprise that technology is the fulcrum of choice. It brings results relatively quickly and these results tend to be clear and measurable. You can calculate a rate of return on your investment in technology. And there is no question that high-tech processes and information management systems have had a remarkable impact on the speed and quality of analysis and decisions people make.

But while technology tools leverage our

interfaces with machines, information and distance, there remains a second, much deeper reservoir of untapped employee potential. I refer to the human element—what some people call the “soft side.” This element involves both an internal and external focus.

The most successful and effective individuals possess a strong internal will...”

The most successful and effective individuals possess a strong *internal* will to do better, to contribute more, to stay focused on results, and to grow and become even more effective. They intrinsically value other people and work hard at mastering interpersonal skills and a better understanding of themselves. The impact of this *emotional intelligence*, to use author Daniel Goleman’s now popular term, is superior effectiveness when dealing with such *external* situations as:

- interfaces with other people in and beyond the organization
- customer/client service
- resiliency in face of challenges and change
- bringing out the best in staff
- harnessing group synergy for creativity and fast results

The good news is these attitudes can be developed and these people skills can be learned. All you have to do is move the fulcrum...

In physics, you move a FULCRUM along a lever to create mechanical advantage. This increased leverage enables you to apply the same amount of FORCE and move a greater WEIGHT.

In your organization, the “force” is your investment in the salaries, wages, benefits, and allocated fixed costs of your people. Three key “fulcrums” are

1. the leadership style of your managers and supervisors
3. the processes and interpersonal dynamics of your teams, and
2. the personal accountability which your individual contributors accept for their performance and their interpersonal effectiveness. The “weight” moved is the results your people ultimately generate.

You deserve a high leverage return on your investment in people ... and it is there for the taking.

Let me suggest the learning curriculum your organization should be offering in order to access that part of your people’s potential that shows up for work but does not get put into play. The recommended programs are grouped under the three key fulcrums mentioned above: Leadership, Team Synergy, and Individual Contributor Effectiveness

“Nothing inspires people more than great leadership.”

Leadership

Nothing inspires people more than great leadership. At its core lies the persistent application of vision, involvement of followers and a belief in their fundamental ability to perform well.

Leadership is not just for top executives. Nurture it at all levels. Teach it to your managers, supervisors, project leaders and lead hands. Whether guiding a department through a period of transition, creating a supportive, gratifying atmosphere for staff, or coaching the best out of a struggling performer or high potential employee, the aspiring leader must be sensitive. He or she must be aware of both the impact of his/her own style and the current needs, fears and hopes of those whom he/she leads. Your leaders should be learning how to:

Δ Manage through others

- Motivating and focusing staff
- Recognizing and rewarding results achieved

- Developing an optimum style
- Clarifying vision, mission, values, and priorities
- Ensuring high performance standards and results

Δ Coach for individual and team performance

Δ Manage change and personal transition

Δ Deal with conflict, resistance and so-called “difficult people”

Δ Run a meeting effectively

“High performing teams focus on results and are willing to address, when required, how they are working together.”

Team Synergy

A “team” can be a group of functional managers, a distinct department, a self-directed work group, or a temporary project team. Whenever people collaborate to perform a task or make a decision, we have a potential minefield of conflicting perceptions, agendas, needs and work styles. High performing teams focus on results and are willing to address, when required, how they are working together. Teach your teams how to:

Δ Boost their performance by...

- Understanding human dynamics in groups
- Establishing agreed-upon operating guidelines
- Clarifying deliverables, expectations, roles and leadership
- Creating trust and openness
- When stuck, taking time out to deal with it
- Building individual member buy-in to a shared vision

Δ Tap into the creative potential of the group

Δ Kickstart a newly formed team

Δ Deal with conflict, resistance and so-called “difficult people”

Δ Run a meeting effectively

Individual Contributor Effectiveness

Individual effectiveness combines a distinct set of skills with a clearly defined attitude about one's personal accountability in life and work. The skills, which all can be learned, fall into four essential categories:

△ **Self-Direction**—Establishing purpose and goals for your job and career

- Identifying (and updating) what is important to you
- Determining your personal strategic career direction
- Planning, to transform your job and career goals into action

△ **Self-Awareness**—Of one's own style, needs, preferences and impact on others

- Taking stock of your skills, knowledge, experience, attitudes, external resources and overall current situation
- Obtaining feedback on how your style is experienced by others

△ **Self-Management**—Daily focus on priorities and maintenance of positive mental, emotional and physical states

- Self-organization & time management
- Harnessing cognitive and creative capacities through mental techniques
- Performing well during pressure and stress
- Maintaining health and physical fitness

△ **Self-Presentation**—Expressing yourself in a variety of ways

- Clear, assertive face-to-face communications
- Networking and influencing others
- Projecting the appropriate, professional image
- Concise and persuasive writing
- Negotiating for win/win

While you cannot pay your people to want to put out extra effort, your leaders can help coax it out and your teams can foster a spirit of going the extra mile. But, ultimately, it is up to the individual. What is your organization doing to develop these skills and attitudes? Focus on them. Move the fulcrums. Leverage your people investment for organizational and business success.

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