

What exactly do people want from work and what to do about it?

Does this sound familiar?

"A study conducted by Human Synergistics of 23,000 managers and executives in Australia found that the average corporate leader in Australia lacks focus, expects failure, is adverse to risk, is easily influenced and insecure, is critical, fault finding and is very conservative.

This study reported in the 20th August 2002 edition of The Australian Financial Review (p. 58), far from being the soft stuff, highlights a pattern of behaviour that was clearly reflected in organisational cultures and also in performance.

The primary thinking and behavioural style of Australian managers, in most cases, was found to be of the avoidance kind.

This is where thinking orientated towards a fear of failure, denial of responsibility for one's own behaviour and defensive withdrawal to cope with threatening situations.

There is increasing evidence that behaviour drives the organisation.

In contrast, effective leaders in the study were found to set their own goals; have sound integrity and a large dose of humility.

Question?

What kind of behaviour do you tend to exhibit?

Culture and leadership feed off each other, and the culture of an organisation defines the way people behave.

The findings were remarkably consistent across both the private and public sectors.

Within these kinds of workplaces many employees would be disengaged and feeling like they didn't matter. This is a hidden, yet significant, cost to any enterprise and cannot be ignored.

So what do people want from work?

According to a recent study released by Accenture, 80 percent of global business leaders believe that 'people issues' are more important today than they were three years ago, and 68 percent believe that retaining talent is far more important than acquiring new staff.

Leading organizations have discovered that providing employees with a comprehensive range of salary, career and skill development opportunities and building a highly skilled, workforce (often transient) is the key to a healthy workplace culture.

In a 2003 article in Australia's BRW magazine, research conducted by the Gallup Organization of more than one million employees over a 25-year period found that the six core elements that attract and retain productive employees.

The Six core elements are:

1. Knowing what is expected of them

(These came up as the number one element of a great place to work and incredibly up to 70% of employees were not clear about what was expected of them).

2. Be able to use their talents every day
3. Receive recognition and acknowledgement for their good work
4. To know that someone at work cares for them as a person
5. To have the opportunity to learn and grow
6. To have their ideas listened to

So what do I need to provide?

There are two important areas to focus on ...

1. Yourself as a leader, and
2. Those you lead.

1. You need have the right kind of Personal Leadership:

Now you know what people want from work from the research – you need to provide it.

Gail Kelly, CEO and Managing Director of St. George Bank, after speaking at the recent Melbourne Business Schools 2002 Women and Management dinner, was quoted as saying: (AFR 24/9/02)

"Leaders should really like people and love what they do. The heart of my role is to work with and get the best out of colleagues. If someone else thought you could do something usually you could. There is a real depth of talent in many organisations and it is the leaders role to recognise and utilise those skills,"

Most leaders find themselves incredibly busy, having to focus on a multitude of tasks, complex responsibilities and with expectations of producing even more profound results than last time.

To change this situation you need to split your focus more than you are comfortable with.

It will require you to focus both on your people, as well as tasks.

12 actions you can take personally:

1. Communicate. Your staff are intelligent and perceptive - treat them as such. Be a first among equals.
2. Provide clarity. People cannot perform effectively until they have a clear understanding of where they stand, where they need to go and how they fit into the big picture. A lack of this can lead to frustration, poor performance and dissatisfaction.
3. Motivate, inspire, empower, guide and direct.
4. Lead by example, live with integrity, practice what you preach and "walk the talk."
5. Create a unique, positive, supportive, successful, effective, fun and exciting culture.
6. Foster teamwork and empower your staff.
7. Be a positive role model.

8. Take action and manage risks.
9. Work towards high quality and continuous improvement.
10. Confront the status quo and embrace change.
11. Encourage feedback and new ideas. Communicate and interact often with employees at all levels of the organization.
12. Offer effective and congruent compelling reasons to your employees to remain loyal and dedicated and to follow you

2. Here are the 11 key elements for others:

A recent book from Gallup '*Follow This Path: How the World's Greatest Organizations Drive Growth by Unleashing Human Potential*' (October 2002, Warner Books), by Gonzalez-Molina & Curt Coffman, quoted research which canvassed 300,000 businesses in Gallup's worldwide database and from that the authors identified eleven key elements which have high priority for all employees in the successful organization.

One place to start, is to find out where your team is at right now... These statements provide another way of ensuring you are providing what people want from work. The answers you get will alert you to where you need to change.

Ask your people to answer these eleven statements.

Ps. The more agreement you get, the more engaged -- and productive -- your people will be, and the more your customers/clients will want to do business with you.

1. I know what is expected of me at work.
2. I have the resources and equipment I need to do my work.
3. I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
4. In the past week I have been acknowledged for doing good work.
5. My manager or someone else at work seems to care about me as a person.
6. Someone at work encourages my development.
7. My opinions seem to count.

8. My company's mission makes me feel my job is important.
9. I have a best friend at work.
10. In the past six months someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
11. I have had opportunities to learn and grow at work.

This article is one of a series of occasional papers on improving organisational and leadership effectiveness written by Gary Russell.

These articles are free for distribution, provided the full author's details are included and no alterations of any kind are made.

About The Human Dimension

Gary Russell of The Human Dimension is the Managing Director and THD team leader, and has worked within large service organisations for more than 25 years.

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