

Who's in Control Here?

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“Leaders resort to the Command and Control model when they are.....scared. That is: scared as hell that followers will figure out that they (the leaders) don't have a clue as to what-the-hell-is-going-on.”

Great leaders on snorting steeds are important...but great talent developers are the bedrock of organizations that perform over the long haul.”

Tom Peters

The old style of management assumed the manager did the thinking and the worker did the job. As Henry Ford once said, “What I want is a good pair of hands, unfortunately I must take them with a person attached.” Those days are gone forever. Whether or not management is an anachronism in today's workplace is debatable. What is not debatable is the demand for autonomy of today's workers who fully expect to be integral to the decision making.

Whether leaders are born, made or evolve on the spot when the situation demands it, there is no question command and control is out and persuasion is in. It's all about identifying and developing talent and that requires subtlety. It is more about vision than task, collaboration and respect than hierarchy. The faceless leader who issues edicts from an ivory tower with a moat around the castle to keep naysayers out and who surrounds him/herself with sycophants will see the talent drain away and the company fade into oblivion.

How do you ensure top talent is attracted to your company and stays long enough for you to reap the benefits? Here are 10 ways you can't afford to ignore:

1. Provide continual opportunities for learning and growth:

Learning is contagious. When one person learns, everyone benefits. You need to have people fully engaged and productive and the more opportunities you provide, the more likely they are to stay. This includes soft skills, not just another certification which may benefit you and them for the moment and then become obsolete.

Build on your greatest resource, which is the experience and expertise you already have in the workforce. Surveys show people at midlife want learning, but only 16% of human resource professionals say they provide them to people over age 50. What a waste of potential. These are also the people who are most likely to stay, based on generational cultural values of loyalty and commitment, so you're bound to get your money's worth over and over. They are also most likely to mentor younger workers and expand your investment exponentially.

2. Break down the barriers of titles and functional areas:

Titles are valuable as communication tools. Who does what? Where do I go to get the answers I need? However, when the title becomes a sign of authority and little else and the functional area is used to separate *them* from *us*, the result is built in redundancy, inefficiency, poor communication and decision making across the organization, and a fortress mentality. How many signatures does it really take to get approval for a simple action? If your company is bound up in justifying its own layers of management rather than getting things done, it's time to get rid of ineffective levels.

3. **Engage the generations:**

We now have 5 generations in the workplace, and they are worlds apart in values, life style choices, perspectives, communication and interests. They don't think alike, care about the same things, or relate to each other in the same way.

Creating task forces and projects that include people from each of the generations helps bridge the gaps and gain the best of each in cross-pollination that increases understanding, and accesses the strengths and interests of each. In addition to individual contributions, each cohort has its signal characteristics: the Elders share wisdom gained from experience, Boomers bring energy, drive to succeed and competitive spirit, Gen X conquers technological challenges, Gen Y brings caring and relationships to the forefront and the Millennials remind us all of what it is to see things with a fresh perspective.

4. **Celebrate calculated risks whether or not they succeed**

Change is endemic in the marketplace and the company that fails to recognize and applaud innovation is doomed to extinction. Command and control assumed the boss was all knowing, all powerful and always right, and intimidation usually worked to keep everyone on the straight and narrow well beaten path. There was even a certain reassurance in continuity and predictability. Today's constantly changing marketplace requires the great wealth of multiple ideas and viewpoints. We need the best of everyone in order to succeed.

Tom Peters, in his book, *Just Say Yes!* says, "Competent is the worst thing you can accuse a fellow human of being." The creative person is intrinsically motivated and should be applauded even when you recognize their ideas may entail risk. Complacency is no longer a viable option.

5. **Provide on-going feedback**

Each of the generations has its own particular need for attention. Surveys show that employees don't leave companies; they leave managers. It is a simple thing to be appreciative, to show you value someone.

Annual evaluations used primarily to determine compensation and promotion potential ignore the human being and can be detrimental to motivation. Nothing should be a surprise if the manager is providing on-going feedback throughout the year: good, bad and developmental.

6. Listen

Listening is critical to good leadership. Not only is it important to getting a sense of workforce issues, real and imagined, but the people who do the job are most likely to have innovative ideas about how to make things better.

Leaders are expected to have the answers. The smart ones begin with the questions.

7. Move from hierarchy to matrix

You can't afford silos. The marketplace is moving too fast to allow people to nestle down in their comfort zones. Matrix teams bring everyone together to identify options, negotiate on the spot, identify blocks, and assign targeted roles.

However, a matrix organization is also the most difficult to manage and it can fail if the responsibility does not carry with it the authority to get things done. Too often, organizations try to cut and paste onto a bureaucratic structure, leaving multiple cross functional teams without leadership or the authority to make decisions. It becomes an exercise in frustration and futility.

8. Create on-line Customer Service communities

Communities are the wave of the future. They serve the interests of the customer first, providing a one-stop shopping center and, at their best, they create interdepartmental collaboration to solve problems and create effective solutions.

Communities are created around a common area of customer concerns to bypass the traditional complaint structure which begins with a customer service request and winds its way through help desks with little if any communication to determine the optimum solution provider.

It relies on social media strategies and some studies believe the potential is there for up to 99% ROI. CRM magazine has ongoing articles on the subject including a July 11, 2009 article entitled, "The 7 Benefits of Online Customer Service Communities," which provides good rationale for bringing the concept to life in your organization.

9. Build a common culture

Can you define your organization's culture in ten words or less? Can anyone else? Would eight out of ten people agree? A culture is the values and norms widely accepted and shared throughout the organization, but it is much more. It is how people share ideas, make decisions, recognize humor and reward each other.

The leader has to define the culture and communicate it constantly, role-modeling the values and expectations. It should be an integral part of recruitment, hiring and orientation and a highlight of all advertising and marketing.

It is the organization's brand in action and, when it is clear, understandable and generally known and accepted, it can be a powerful tool in creating an energizing place to work where people can focus on doing their best, because they know *who* they are in the grand scheme of things.

10. Reward what you value

Do your top values include the fact that the employee is:

- Still living
- Comes to work on a regular basis
- Generally completes tasks
- Stays out of trouble

If so, your annual compensation increases are probably doing the job.

However, if you want to increase performance, encourage innovation, engage people, create customer advocates and enjoy your leadership role more, you need to identify what you really want people to strive for at the next annual review.

As Tom Peters says, "Reward excellent failures; punish mediocre successes." Make your reward system reflect what you value most, not length of service, and adequate performance. You can't afford not to raise the bar.