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MAKING OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR

Building a feedback culture at work

Giving feedback simply means telling people how they're going at work. However, the real art of feedback is the ability to also accept feedback yourself - being prepared to listen to what others tell you, without being defensive if it's bad news.

Building a feedback culture in your organization, where everyone is comfortable about giving and receiving feedback about their performance, builds employee morale. Accepting feedback yourself helps you discover ways to improve your own or your business performance.

Many managers and supervisors though equate feedback with delivering bad news, with criticism of poor employee performance. But employee feedback also can, and should, be about giving good news. The reality seems to be that it isn't often done.

Giving, and taking, feedback starts at the top, with the business owner, the manager, even with the team leader. It means stepping back from the immediate action and looking at the bigger picture, at the business from a leader's perspective.

What do leaders do? They do things that inspire people to follow them, to help them build the business. Your people need to know exactly what they have to do, or not do, and how well they are going. They need feedback - and so do you.

As a leader you can give positive feedback, deliver negative feedback in a constructive manner and also encourage feedback for yourself. This kind of give and take builds a feedback culture that encourages staff while it grows and strengthens your business.

A Five-Step Process for Improving Communication

Developing a constructive feedback culture in your organization really isn't difficult. Once you change your thinking from manager to leader the rest is easy. Very simply, it takes a five-step process to build more effective employee relationships. You can use this process to guide your reflection as a leader.

1. Think and act like a leader

Learn why you need to be a leader, what people want from a leader, what it takes to be a leader and how constructive feedback is an essential part of leadership.

2. Clarify what you want

Clarify your mission and vision for the business or department and decide what projects and tasks need to be done to achieve it.

3. Understand staff needs

Learn from research what all employees want; then apply some practical strategies for improving your own workplace relationships and business.

International assignments in a changing world

Until a few years ago, relocations were a relatively simple business. Companies selected their most career-oriented employees, got them to pack a few belongings and move with family to the other side of the globe.

The relocations and international assignment business has come a long way since then. As globalization steadily continues, companies are now more cost conscious than ever and it has become imperative for companies to evolve. Most companies are now changing their relocation policies to adapt to the current economic, social and technological environment and also to ensure the employee receives much needed support during a move. Consequently, managing assignments have become more complex as more assignments of shorter durations have come into play.

Also, according to recommendations yielded from the recent Asia Pacific Global Workforce Summit, a macro-economic power shift away from the U.S. and toward Asian economic powers will cause policies, practices and processes to originate in the East.

How committed is the potential assignee?

In today's complex world of relocations, no matter how simple a move may seem, the demands of working overseas cannot be underestimated. It requires a great deal of commitment from the employee, that is far greater than that of the one, who agrees to a relocate from New York to Los Angeles or vice versa. The Company must determine as best as possible how committed the employee will be on an overseas assignment.

Tools such as assignment selection, cross-cultural training, and pre-departure counseling can help resolve potential issues and bring other major issues to light. This assists in deciding if the employee is not the best candidate for an assignment and inevitably saves the Company thousands of dollars by averting a failed relocation.

The Family

Family concerns, especially spousal discontent, is one of the major reasons for failed assignments. According to a study conducted by GMAC in 2006, 67% of failed relocations were due to family discontent. How keen will a family from the United States or the United Kingdom be, to relocate to China, which is on the other side of the globe….

Spouses often feel that HR is not empathetic enough during this time. This might be due to lack of direct communication or even miscommunication of the policy entitlements. In order to avoid situations like these, it is important to establish good and clear communication patterns. Involvement of the spouse from the start of the process tends to work better as also having destination service providers provide timely reporting to HR on the status of each move.

In the case of dual career couples, it is

extremely helpful in establishing the spouse's careers prospects in the host country. Some companies are also now even looking for ways to hire spouses, who may be able to slip into available roles.

Leaving extended family behind, especially aging parents has also become a major factor to contend with.

Clearly defined, explicit and standardised working procedures and quality control mechanisms should be implemented.

In order to encourage employees to take up an international assignment, companies often factor into compensation packages, generous allowances for housing, schooling, Cost of Living Adjustments plus 'hardship allowances' when relocating to developing countries, where the challenges of settling in are deemed to be greater.

Importance of the 'Look See' Visit

Employers are also now offering the employee and the spouse a familiarization or a Look See trip to the potential host country, to help them during this decision-making phase. It not only provides the employee and his/ her family the opportunity of experiencing the country first hand, it can be vital in helping them decide whether they will be able to fit in to the new culture, business and family wise. It helps the employee focus on the 'finer' aspects of the relocation.

Ideally, the preparation for this international assignment should begin eight to twelve months in advance (most times, this is a luxury!). This allows the expatriate and his or her family to comprehend what the move will involve. It must be understood that open-mindedness is the key factor in the success of any relocation.

Completing Immigration formalities

Once an employee has accepted the assignment, completion of immigration formalities cannot be ignored. More often than not, these formalities are assumed to be only a completion of paperwork. However, it is critical to be aware of the immigration policies in the host country, not only from the employee's point of view but also from the entire family's perspective.

For instance, some countries like Singapore, do not recognize unmarried/ defacto partners. These partners are therefore not automatically eligible for dependant immigration passes. Partners receive long term visit passes, which do not permit them to work. This situation of the partner being 'in limbo' often causes tremendous stress even causing the couple to return back to their home country.

In order to reduce such risks companies must prepare assignees well in advance and where possible, have all relevant immigration passes and visa approved prior to leaving home.

The expatriate on assignment

The expatriate on assignment is required to deal with the culture shock in the host country, ensure that his/ her family is settling in as best as possible, many a time slot in home-viewing appointments and is also expected to hit the ground running at the new place of work. This is to say the least extremely demanding.

Companies are often not able to provide the level of support required to expatriates during this time, due to lack of adequate resources in the HR department, coupled with the fact that most of the HR staff may have little or no experience of having lived overseas.

Some functions are now being outsourced to third party Assignment Management/ Destination Service providers, whose Consultants will have a good deal of knowledge of the host country and provide information from housing to pet care and much more. Often, expatriates in an alien country only want someone they can relate to and someone who will provide unbiased information on the host location.

Repatriation

Many are of the misconception that repatriation is simpler than expatriation. However, it must be understood that repatriation is as complex as the relocation itself, if not more. In order to maintain a competitive edge, retention of employees is imperative. This also helps capture the knowledge the employee has gained, while on assignment. Companies are now adopting various strategies to build the employee's trust and increase job security.

Providing training and mentoring to the employee as part of the repatriation process will ease the stress during this time.

The topics may include adjusting to the cultural and professional changes that have taken place in the home country. It is also vital for the company to chart a career path for the employee, which will encourage the employee to pursue a career within the same organization, consequently improving organizational effectiveness and employee effectiveness and creating a win-win situation all around.

Employee Communication: 5 Tips to engage employees

When we think of employee communication most organizations focus on information tools. These include intranet sites, staff magazines, CEO blog, Town Hall meetings and so on. Whilst all these employee communication methods are to be applauded, they inform employees about what is going on. To truly engage employees in the process of change, for instance, a merger or acquisition, a re-organization, financial results or corporate social responsibility, employee communication methods need to be designed to actively engage employees.

Employee engagement should always result in some positive change of behaviour which will then lead to the achievement of organizational goals. Just distributing information by any of the above methods will not achieve the change in employee behaviour and organizational outcomes you are looking for.

Here are 5 tips that will ensure that your employee communication methods do achieve those outcomes.

1. The first tip is to establish whether the tools and methods you are currently using to communicate with employees are engagement strategies or information tools. So gather all the tools used and identify all the methods used, their frequency, intended audience, whether they are one way or two way communication vehicles and review the key messages.

2. The second tip is important because your ultimate aim in employee communication has to be to create the "Aha Moment". The "Aha Moment" is based on information that challenges the employee's belief about an aspect of the business. The information that suddenly helps employees say, "Now it makes sense", "Now I understand", "Now I can do something about it". Once you know what the "Aha Moment" is this will form your key message and the basis of your design of your employee communication strategy.

3. This third tip explains the best type of research to find out what the "Aha Moment" is, and the best type for this purpose is focus group research. Focus group research allows you to ask employees about your business and their thoughts on competitors, to identify the largest gap between what customers think and what staff think customers think, and to identify what would create a paradigm shift in employee's thinking. It also helps you identify how you will measure the impact of the change in employees thinking and to determine how significant it is to achieving the business objectives.

Ten ideas to build your leadership bench strength & Improving Company Performance

When it comes to leadership bench strength, some company benches are dangerously light. These companies, from large corporations to small and mid-sized businesses, lack the talent needed to sustain or grow the business beyond its current level.

Some companies have depended on the same leaders for years without developing new leaders. Other companies have attempted to develop leaders, but there is no strategic or integrated approach. Still other companies have unexpectedly lost leaders they were counting on.

Each year, about 25 percent of managers in typical Fortune 500 companies change jobs. Most spend an average of four years in a given position. High potential leaders in mid-senior ranks move more frequently: every two to three years. These statistics demonstrate why companies must build solid leadership. Leaders must concentrate on developing their teams, getting the right people in the right jobs and producing results.

Job dissatisfaction is up. Some research indicates that one out of six people expects to quit a job in the next year. There are more opportunities for people to seek "greener pastures." Good leadership can influence a person's decision to remain with a company.

10 Ideas for Building Your Leadership Bench Strength

If your company wants to build leadership strength, here are my top ten suggestions:

1. Transfer knowledge and experience from the top

Companies can capture the wisdom from experienced leaders to aid in educating and developing future leaders.

2. Build relationships across generations

Leadership skills, talents and values differ across generations. Dealing with these differences constructively strengthens the overall leadership of your organization.

3. Strengthen leadership peer relationships

Often, large organizations operate like a conglomeration of silos. It's easy for leaders to feel isolated in their roles. Helping leaders learn from each other and strengthening interpersonal relationships build needed peer support and camaraderie.

Staying cool and confident under pressure

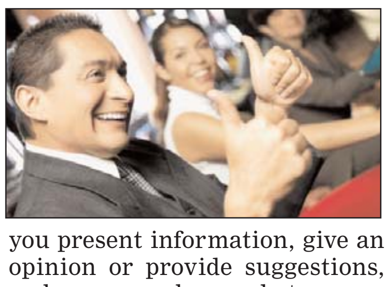
"So, Susan, your report indicates you support forging ahead with the expansion but have you considered the impact this will have on our customers? Surely you remember the fiasco in Dallas last year when they tried the same type of project?"

Yikes! If you're Susan, you're likely feeling under pressure! You have to answer the question and allay the CEO's concerns about the disruption to customers. What do you do? What do you say? How do you say it? What if you can't think of anything to say?

This is not an uncommon situation. Whether you are put on the spot while attending a meeting, presenting a proposal, selling an idea, or answering questions after a presentation, articulating your thoughts in unanticipated situations is a skill. Thinking on your feet is highly coveted skill and when you master it, your clever and astute responses will instill immediate confidence in what you are saying.

When you can translate your thoughts and ideas into coherent speech quickly, you ensure your ideas are heard. You also come across as being confident, persuasive, and trustworthy.

Confidence is key when learning to think on your feet. When



you present information, give an opinion or provide suggestions, make sure you know what you are talking about and that you are well informed. This doesn't mean you have to know everything about everything, but if you are reasonably confident in your knowledge of the subject, that confidence will help you to remain calm and collected even if you are put unexpectedly in the hot seat.

The secret of thinking on your feet is to be prepared: learn some skills and tactics, and do some preparation for situations that might put you under pressure. Then when you do find yourself faced with unexpected questions and debate, you'll be ready to draw on these tactics and preparation, and so stay poised while you compose your thoughts and prepare your response. Here are some tips and tactics:

1. Relax

This is often the opposite of how you are feeling when you're under pressure, but in order for your voice to remain calm and for your brain to "think", you have to be as relaxed as possible.

Take deep breaths

Take a second and give yourself a positive and affirming message

Clench invisible muscles (thighs, biceps, feet) for a few seconds and release.

2. Listen

It comes as no surprise that listening is critical to thinking on your feet. Why do you need to listen? To make sure you fully understand the question or request before you reply. If you answer too soon, you risk going into a line of thinking that is unnecessary or inappropriate. To help you with your listening remember to:

Look directly at the questioner

Observe body language as well as what is being spoken

Try to interpret what is being suggested by the question or request. Is this an attack, a legitimate request for more information, or a test? Why is this person asking this and what is the intention?

Tip:

Remember that the person is asking a question because he or she is interested. Some interest is positive - they simply want to know more - and some is negative - they want to see you squirm. Either way they are interested in what you have to say. It's your privilege and pleasure not to disappoint them!

3. Have the Question Repeated

If you're feeling particularly under pressure, ask for the question to be repeated. This gives you a bit more time to think about your response.

At first glance people think this will only make them look unsure. It doesn't. It makes you look concerned that you give an appropriate response. It also gives the questioner an opportunity to rephrase and ask a question that is more on point. Remember, the questioner may well have just "thought on his or her feet" to ask the question, so when you give them a second chance, the question may well be better articulated and clearer to all.

By asking to have the question repeated you also get another opportunity to assess the intentions of the questioner. If it is more specific or better worded, chances are the person really wants to learn more. If the repeated question is more aggressive than the first one, then you know the person is more interested in making you uncomfortable than anything else. When that's the case, the next tip comes in very handy.

4. Use Stall Tactics

Sometimes you need more time to get your thoughts straight and calm yourself down enough to make a clear reply. The last thing you want to do is blurt out the first thing that comes to your mind. Often this is a defensive comment that only makes you look insecure and anxious rather than confident and composed.

Repeat the question yourself. This gives you time to think and you clarify exactly what is being asked. It also allows you to rephrase if necessary and put a positive spin on the request. "How have I considered the impact on customers in order to make sure they have a continued positive experience during the expansion?"

Narrow the focus. Here, you ask a question of your own to not only clarify, but to bring the question down to a manageable scope. "You're interested in hearing how I've considered customer impacts. What impacts are you most interested in: product availability or in-store service? "