

the SUNDAY TIMES

EMPLOYMENT TIMES

MAKING OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR

Harness the Potential and Retain the Best

I get to speak to many company CEOs, General Managers and business owners in my line of work. Two of the topics that repeatedly come up in discussions are 'lower productivity due to lack of motivation of the employees' and 'good staff leaving the company'. When you flip these challenges around, the two biggest tasks required from HR development these days are:

- Support recruited staff to perform at their best - Harness the potential
- Keep the best staff from leaving - Retention of the best

The era where companies were looking for hard working people is long past. The challenges of the new millennium require creative, flexible and smart workers who not just work but shape and grow the company.

Where do we find these smart workers? Answering the above question at a business forum, a HR Manager in service sector in Sri Lanka said "We find these innovative, creative and very energetic people in our interviews. However, once they are hired and you meet them after few months, they are hardly recognizable. Some have become very lethargic and negative that you wouldn't believe that they are the same optimistic people who came for the interview".

What has happened to these people? Were they pretending to be innovative and energetic at the interview? I personally don't think so. Then the question is what changed them into negative and



mediocre performers? Either they are very comfortable with the current tasks of the job, they have lost the drive and energy that pushes them forward; when you are not challenged, mundane repetition often makes you lethargic. Or, they have become secure and settled in their work that they do not see a need to perform at a peak level to stay where they are or to move forward.

The employees who are alert and smart enough to recognize these signs in them (who often are the best workers) find ways to take themselves away from these undesirable situations - they are the ones who often move on to other more challenging and better rewarding oppor-

tunities elsewhere. Then the companies are left with a workforce that is not taking the company agenda forward at the desired pace - yet with so much unrealized and untapped potential!

Retention of employees is no longer simple. You do not want to simply retain the recruited staff, but rather the wanted and best staff. At the same time you want to support all staff to perform at their best - so increase the company revenue and drive the company agenda forward.

I will only discuss about staff performance development component today, leaving retention for next week.

What can the company do to bring out the best in their employees?

Isn't employee development what my Manager or HR department should do? Many people ask!. The answer is Yes and No. Your immediate Manager and the Human Resource department have the duty to look after and develop their employees but you are responsible for your own development and success as a human being. How would you feel if you reach your last day on earth with the brilliant song that your life meant to sing still silent within you? Could you say it was my Manager's fault?!

I am highlighting some of the practical messages that you as an employee can absorb to be responsible for your own professional development and heightened perform-

ance.

1. Performance before Rewards: In the competitive business world today, each one of us need to take personal responsibility by becoming the CEO of our own roles and leaders within our own positions in order for our company to succeed amidst all the turbulence. Some people go to work with the mindset that they will perform at mastery and go the extra mile in everything they do when they get a bigger title and when they are granted more responsibility. But a restaurant is the only place I know of where you get the good stuff first and then you pay the price. In our life and at work, we need to pay the price of success before we get all the rewards.

2. Invest on Optimism: the people who know about the trainings and workshops I do on the science of optimism sometimes challenge me by saying, "life is very uncertain and being positive is not realistic". Rather than going in to the numerous scientific research that has demonstrated my case, I simply say that it is reported that over 90% of what we worry about never happens. That means that our negative worries have about 10% chance of being correct. If this is so, isn't it possible that being positive is more realistic than being negative? One of the most desired qualities of a modern day ideal employee, as highlighted by top CEOs in the world, is optimism in challenging situations. This is more a learned quality than an innate one and there is so much worth in investing in learning how

to be optimistic - whether through books, seminars, workshops or role models.

3. 'Service' your Motivation: I have witnessed trainees of my workshops walk out with heightened energy, motivation and focus. These periodic 'servicing' of energy is a must for the much stretched and challenge modern day workforce. I compare this to the care you give to your vehicle. You wash it every morning (or at least every other day) at home. Once or twice a week you take your vehicle to a "car wash" for a proper and a better wash. There, you get your vehicle vacuumed, get your carpets cleaned etc. Then every three months or so, you go for a service where you change oil, get your battery water checked and clean your air filters and so on. They all come under "servicing your vehicle". However, some would argue saying "I just need fuel and a running engine for me to move from A to B. Why waste time and money on services?" Of course the car can run without maintenance but it runs with the risk of getting stuck in the middle of nowhere with a ceased engine. This process more or less applies to your emotional energy and motivation too.

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Personal development: Why work?

How many people do you know who are happy with their jobs? Perhaps you are one who is working just to survive and make ends meet, deriving little satisfaction from your employment. Those who find fulfillment, joy and contentment in their work do exist, but they are not the majority. One thing is sure: to be fulfilling and ultimately satisfying, work needs a long-range goal and an overall opportunity for personal development.

The many books, articles and reports that address the state of various national workforces testify to the fact that something is fundamentally wrong with the modern approach to working life. Note this comment from an anonymous essay on the Internet: "Work as we know it tends to make us unhappy because we do so much of it, because it is so repetitive, because we don't get to choose what we do, and because what we are doing is often not in the best interest of our fellow human beings." Many of us could echo that observation.

Of course, a number of factors contribute to the sense of well-being we can draw from our employment. Similarly there are specific causes for the dissatisfaction that workers experience. Identifying them may provide some helpful insight.

HARD QUESTIONS

Do we have the courage to ask ourselves whether it's possible that people weren't intended to live and work as we do today? Of course, there are implications behind such a bold question; namely, that we did not evolve from a primeval life form but were created by a divine Being. Could it be possible that work has become such a burden today because we are not "working" in the way the One who created us intended?

Let's take a moment to put aside any preconceived notions we might have and explore this line of thinking to see whether there is a relationship between the purpose of human existence and where we are today in terms of work. The Bible simply says that man was created in the image and likeness of God. Religion and the Bible describes the human form but also addresses the purpose of life. In the first chapters of the Bible God reveals Himself not as a singular entity but in a family relationship--Elohim in Hebrew. In the first chapter of John's Gospel we learn that Jesus Christ was known as "the Word" before He came in human form. As the Word He was with God and He was God. So, long before the earth and human life existed, there were two Beings who have always existed.

Humankind was created to have a physical relationship with God that would develop into an eternal, spiritual family relationship--to become "sons of God," as the New Testament expresses it: "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19). Whereas animals were made after their own kind, man was made



after the God kind, a unique creation with a unique purpose.

Having created the physical human form complete with a conscious mind, God gave humans stewardship over the earth. The Garden of Eden was a perfect environment and provided the training ground for what man was to do as the human population increased and more of the earth's surface was inhabited. Adam and his descendants were given dominion over the various animal life forms. Regarding the environment, he was told to "tend and keep it," or nurture and preserve it.

Humanity was set to work, living as a physical entity. But unlike animals, during their lifetime humans were to take on the mind and character of the One who had created them, to develop in His likeness. To facilitate this development of character, God gave humans work to do and guidelines for how that work was to be performed.

Unfortunately, the story we see in the first few chapters of Genesis is that almost from the very beginning people refused to work in compliance with the way of life God set before them, choosing instead to "do their own thing." Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden and allowed to decide for themselves the way of life they wanted to live. Mankind had refused the fruit of the tree of life, which would have provided a continuing close relationship with the Creator and the environment He had created.

The original concept of work was bound up in a family-oriented relationship with the environment such that we could realistically refer to it as a way of life. God intended work to be part of our way of life. Our efforts were to be directly tied to the support and development of His family through stewardship of land and animals. In modern parlance we would say we are to take ownership, or responsibility, for the environment in which we live and for the positive development of home and family. This supplies purpose to human efforts and results in a great sense of fulfillment.

Ownership is a vital key to worker satis-

faction. In the context of our personal labor, it means we will be doing things that we feel are productive and useful. This can be accomplished to some degree even in today's urban environment. Obvious examples are starting our own business or working in a small partnership where the various tasks undertaken lead to the construction of the whole. If we look at the Garden of Eden model, the key to worker satisfaction would be ownership of land. Not just a suburban lot, but land enough to require the effort of all family members in providing for the family unit. In the original model there was no urbanization or specialization as we know it today.

Ownership of land creates a bonding by virtue of economic interest. It also ensures direct benefit for any work invested, as well as the emotional reward of seeing results for personal effort. It helps build loyalty as the effort of each member of the family contributes to the greater whole rather than merely to self-fulfillment.

PURPOSE-DRIVEN WORK

For physical and mental endeavors to be meaningful and rewarding, they must have purpose. A goal beyond sustaining physical life can inspire and motivate to great accomplishments. But when the horizon becomes blurred and the peaks of success appear an impossible dream, there is no reason to strive to do better. We become bogged down in mediocrity and too easily satisfied. Temporary pleasures seem to be all that is left within reach, so we busy ourselves with comforts and enjoying life and leave altruistic pursuits to others.

Unfulfilling jobs sap our energy and imagination. But even the most menial of tasks, if performed for a purpose and with a worthwhile end in view, are rewarding. Much of the satisfaction we can draw from work springs from our mental approach and our focus on the future. Most in the Western world are working toward the goal of a comfortable retirement. Sadly, by the time they get there they may find that their health has broken down and their families have disintegrated.