

RETAINING HIGH-PERFORMING EMPLOYEES

Some of the most pressing human resource management issues in organizations today center on the need to effectively obtain and retain high performing employees and to continually increase productivity and profitability.

Employee recognition and appreciation are critical elements of motivating and retaining employees, but the ways in which they are delivered play a huge part in how individuals perceive those efforts (which may be very different from the organization's intentions).

Consider the case where the Human Resource department is assigned the responsibility to develop and implement an "Employee Appreciation/Recognition Program", and to communicate the "new program" to all employees. This scenario is fairly typical of what happens in many companies. The results are often typical as well, falling far short of expectations, and very often senior executives are baffled by why employees don't seem to "appreciate" what has been "done for them" (i.e., employees are not responding to the Recognition Program the way management had hoped they would).

It is more likely not that many of these appreciation programs are perceived by employees as merely a Human Resource department initiative ("program of the month"), not as values embedded in the corporate culture and demonstrated in a sincere manner by individual managers on a daily basis. While Human Resource initiatives are often extremely beneficial to organizations, they can't be truly successful if everyday behavior by

managers is not also consistent with the values espoused by those programs.

If productivity and retention problems exist in an organization, it is likely that employees feel managers do not demonstrate sufficient appreciation for their contributions and assume that the organization is not sincere in its claims that it values its employees.

Most employees, regardless of position or salary level, possess the ability to see through "window dressing", and to recognize a lack of congruency between what people say and what they do. Don't insult the intelligence of your workforce by mistakenly assuming that they will believe in initiatives that lack integrity simply because a great deal of work was involved in developing them.

Employees may be influenced by window dressing initiatives, but quite possibly not in a way that is positive for the organization! The incredible popularity of Dilbert comic strips, books, posters, etc., and the frequency with which they are seen posted in employees cubicles or anonymously on company bulletin boards should tell us something?

Consider the following realities and it will become evident as to why and/or what things may need to change in your organization:

- ✚ People are influenced more by what others do than by what they say.

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- ✚ All individuals have basic needs for personal actualization and recognition.
- ✚ People make changes in their lives when the need to change outweighs any fear of change.
- ✚ Employees are "volunteering" to work for your organization (and could just as easily decide to volunteer to work for another organization if their needs are not being met).

Retention must be managed proactively, not reactively. Don't wait until employees resign to find out why they decide to leave. Instead find out now what would most strongly encourage your existing employees to stay with the company, and help managers to start doing more of those things! Usually the solutions will not cost much to implement, and provide attractive returns on the company's human capital investment.



You have our best wishes and regards for continued success.

John C. Colson, President