

PERSONNEL NOTEBOOK

For Your Most Important Resource

RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP IN TOUGH TIMES

How do conscientious leaders make things happen? Consider that for leaders, being conscientious is not only about recognizing reality, but it's also about influencing or even creating that reality. Today it's easy for any of us to recognize the reality of the recession we are living in. But the best leaders make things happen by creating strategies to deal with it.

What kind of strategies are successful leaders using to keep employees engaged in these tough times? Even if companies haven't actually lost their employees, many have lost them psychologically. Employee engagement is the continuing job of the leader.

In his new book *"The Sharks and the Goldfish: Positive Ways to Thrive During Waves of Change,"* author and consultant Jon Gordon says, "You need to personally make sure that your company is a place where people want to work. You must focus on winning in the workplace if you want to win in the marketplace." He offers the following leadership strategies for boosting morale and engagement in our current economy.

Focus on people, not numbers

"It's not the numbers that drive people, but the people who drive numbers," says Gordon. Numbers are just the indicators of how well your people are doing. Remember, "Culture drives behavior, behavior drives habits, and habits drive results."

Model good behavior

Leaders set the tone for employees. They can inspire or agitate, they can motivate or de-motivate. Come to work greeting people cheerfully, and they're likely to mirror that attitude. Whatever you expect of your people should also be expected of their leaders.

"Leaders need to be humble and hungry," Gordon explains. "Humble in what they seek to learn, grow, and improve every day, and hungry with a passion to work harder than everyone else."

Practice "Positive Leadership"

"Positive Leadership" means remaining purposefully focused in the face of adversity. "While it's important to acknowledge the obstacles your organization is facing, don't dwell on them and don't bring up the bad news before you've pointed out the one or two things that are going well," says Gordon.

Optimistically focus on where you are going. “Remember,” he says, “culture drives behavior. You win in the office first, and then you win in the marketplace.”

Fill the void

In these uncertain times, employees are questioning how their industries and jobs will be impacted. This uncertainty creates a void and, says Gordon, “Where there is a void, negativity will fill it.” In the absence of clear and positive communication, people will assume the worst.

“As a leader, you must *personally* meet with your employees and continuously communicate, communicate, communicate.” He advises. “Make transparency the norm, not the exception. Talk to your team members often and let them know where they stand. Host frequent town hall meetings in which you listen to employee’s fears, concerns, and ideas. Share your vision for the future.”

Tell the “Energy Vampires” to get on the bus ... or get off

You might think that a few non-conformists and cynics wouldn’t be a major problem, but Gordon insists that you’d be wrong. He calls those who are constant sources of negativity “Energy Vampires” because they suck the energy and life out of everyone around them.

“Once you’ve identified the naysayers, gently approach them and give them a chance to get on the bus and share in the positive vision,” says Gordon. Hear them out, but if they refuse to get on board, you must get them off the bus. “Even if your biggest complainer is your highest performer,” he says, “the negative energy outweighs any positive contributions.”

Forbid complaints without solutions

Successful organizations with great cultures focus on solutions, not complaints. Deal with the problems but don’t let them become your purpose; your focus must be the solutions. Gordon’s rule is simple: “You are not allowed to complain unless you also offer a solution.”

Teach your people to be heroes, not victims

Gordon points out that both heroes and victims get knocked down. But heroes get back up while victims simply give up.

“Help your employees to realize that they are not victims of circumstance. Remind them that they have a lot of control over what happens. They have a significant influence over how things turn out.” It’s true, he says that “you can’t always control the events in your life, but you can control how you respond to those events-and your response controls the outcome.”

Focus on the small wins

“The key,” says Gordon, “is to always place your attention on those little, ordinary, non-spectacular wins that add up to big successes.” His credo is to expect success, look for success, and celebrate success.

“Keep in mind that employees might be discouraged or burnt out right now. So, make sure to really highlight and celebrate the small wins in order to foster loyalty, excitement, and confidence,” he urges. “Championships are won as the result of many small wins.”

Make sure you have “sharks” in your key positions

When the economy was thriving it didn’t matter quite as much if key employees

turned in a mediocre performance on occasion. “But, that isn’t the case now” Gordon states. He suggests looking at your team and figuring out which people display the characteristics of driven, go-getter, “nice sharks” and which are “goldfish” or the more relationship-focused managers.

Your sharks are the people you need in sales or business-driving positions, he suggest, not your goldfish. People who aren’t in the right positions won’t thrive, and your organization will constantly find itself struggling,” he says.

Too many organizations have goldfish types in sales positions, and that’s why they aren’t thriving, he says. A major part of being a leader is to know your people and their skills, talents, and attitudes. “Put your people in the right positions and allow them to do what they do best,-and they will help your company to perform at its best.”

Many human resources experts like Gordon are advising that 2010 is going to test the skills of leaders as few times ever have. His tips above give us insight on navigating during the storm. But, we can turn to the American Management Association (AMA) for its expertise on how we should prepare for the adventure before it starts.

Recently, the AMA recommended a new book by Gayle Lantz, founder and president of the leadership consulting firm Workmatters, Inc., and author of *Take the Bull by the Horns: The Busy Leader’s Guide to Growing Your Business — and Yourself*. Lantz advises that before you go any further into the economic fray, prepare yourself! She suggests asking yourself the following 10 essential questions:

1. What matters most?

There’s no right or wrong answer to this. What was most important two years ago today may not likely be your organization’s driving force. Press the reset button, gather your team, clarify your priorities, and commit to keeping them in focus.

2. What is the one problem I can turn into an opportunity?

No rose-colored glasses please. Just view a current challenge through the lens of opportunity. Think about past successes in your company, and figure out how to apply those skills to the issues at hand.

“Remember,” says Lantz, “you build on strengths, not by “fixing” weaknesses.”

3. What do my employees need from me now?

Be careful about sending the messages *you* want to hear. Look at things from your employees’ point of view — if *they* don’t feel understood, they won’t be listening anyway. Resist the urge to tell them how they should think or feel. Also, inspiration doesn’t only come from motivational speeches to the masses, but also from informal examples of leadership.

4. What is my customer’s greatest pain?

Be relentless about knowing and meeting that need. Skip the complicated surveys. Instead, pick up the phone, and ask, listen, and understand. Then get busy offering solutions.

5. What new business relationships will I pursue?

New opportunities come from new relationships inside and outside your industry. Seek out opportunities where there is potential for mutual benefit — not just what’s in it for me? “Even in this new world of social media,” she says, “significant business relationships begin with real dialogue-not a Tweet.”

decision as to how you'll confront and control it is also yours.

6. How will I be more strategic?

Get serious about setting direction, always starting with the big picture view of the possibilities. Resist the urge to discuss and deal with tactics until you're clear on what you want to accomplish.

7. How can I make swift, yet smart decisions?

Now, more than ever, you can't afford to over-analyze. Clear the "mind clutter" that plagues even the best leaders. Make way for swift decision making. A good hint: Slow down your thinking processes on the front-end, during the planning process, so you can make faster and better decisions later.

8. What leadership skill can — and should — I get better at?

As a leader, your personal effectiveness, affects the success of the business. Pick the leadership skill that needs your attention — listening, coaching, communicating, problem solving, — and commit to improvement. Small changes can really make a big difference. Just ask your team and others on the receiving end.

9. How will I recognize success?

You won't know if the business is on the right track if you haven't first determined some key indicators. But realize that not all success can be measured in numbers. So also consider how you'll know when a result "feels right."

10. What is my biggest fear? And how will I face it?

Name it and claim it. If you don't, it can be damaging, even deadly to the business. After all, what you resist, or back away from, you empower. Own your fear, it's yours and the

The skills for leadership may be the same in every situation, but the vision, strategy, tactics, and actions will change as the conditions change. The responsible leader adapts to fit the conditions and focuses him- or herself and the team on what they will do now.

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