



WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

Trust—cornerstone for high performance culture

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A CEO for a privately held telecommunications company just learned the results of a recent corporate culture survey. Only forty percent of her employees responded favorably in the category of “Employee Engagement.” She was disappointed and frustrated, recognizing the impact of high employee engagement on achieving operational excellence. The initiatives that she implemented within the past year to boost commitment had failed. She didn’t know what to do next.

In a January 2017 *Harvard Business Review* article titled “The Neuroscience of Trust,” Paul J. Zak describes how he used scientific principles to quantify the relationship between trust, happiness, high engagement, and high organizational performance. The empirical evidence is impressive. Through his analysis, he demonstrates a statistically significant correlation between purpose-driven work with a trusted team and happiness on the job.

Based on the research evidence, Zak proposes a number of proven cultural changes that, if implemented, will boost the level of trust in an organization.

Recognize excellence. The general rules regarding effective recognition apply. It should immediately follow the praise-worthy event, come from peers (making it more meaningful than from a boss), and be tangible, unexpected, personal, and public.

Induce “challenge stress.” Although stress isn’t generally considered healthy, being challenged by an achievable assignment is motivational. This is particularly effective when given to a team where collaboration and pooling of talents is necessary.

Get out of employees’ way. Empowering employees to determine for themselves how to carry out assignments builds confidence and yields more creative solutions. Often, the newest employees will come up with the most innovative solutions. They aren’t yet vested in the “right” way of doing things.

Enable job-crafting. Some high-tech companies allow employees to spend 20 percent of their time working on what interests them. People will spend more time working in their “zone” when the work appeals to their personal style and intellectual preferences. Greater innovation and a higher level of teamwork occurs in an environment where colleagues are

encouraged to share ideas to help colleagues tackle thorny problems.

Share information broadly. Wherever there is a gap in information, there will be a rumor to fill it. Although a rumor may receive high marks for creativity, it can be totally wrong and may be damaging. Rather than leaving important matters to innovative minds, fill the voids through open communications. Use multimedia and social media to present information in digestible bites.

Build relationships intentionally. Taking colleagues into the woods to complete an obstacle course may not suit everyone, but there is value in intentional team-building activities that develop personal connections among workmates. Social interaction and friendly competition create personal connections that carry over into the workplace.

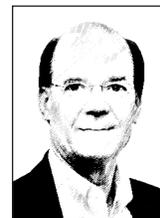
Facilitate whole-person growth. Get to know your people and understand their personal goals, career aspirations, and personal development—their work/life balance needs. Make it an ongoing conversation, not the subject of a once-a-year performance review.

Show vulnerability. Being omniscient isn’t a prerequisite for leadership. Effective leaders know what they don’t know and are quick to turn to others who are more likely to have the answers—regardless of their position in the company.

The payoff of building a high-trust organization can be substantial. Compared with low-trust companies, people at high-trust companies report:

- 74% less stress;
- 50% higher productivity;
- 76% more engagement; and
- 40% less burnout.

Because of the correlation between trust, purpose-driven work, happiness, and high engagement, you can assess your culture with one diagnostic question and score it on a five-point scale. Ask employees, “How much do you enjoy your job on a typical day?” If the response is below your expectation, there’s work to be done.



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