

Teamwork—Make the Most of Your Company and its Employees

By Kenneth A. Shaw

Autumn is upon us and it is a good time—before the rush of the holiday season and the closing of another year—to take stock of your leadership team, its strengths and weaknesses as a group and individually. This is also when you can take another look at the work environment to ensure that it is conducive to the recruitment, retention and growth of employees. First, let's address the leadership team and the individuals that comprise it.

Here are three questions to ask:

1. Does the sum of your team's talents exceed the sum of its parts? Here we are talking about teamwork. We are also talking about having the totality of skills that makes each individual more productive and the team at the top of its game. Often abilities such as thinking creatively, working strategically and making wise decisions are missing from the team. What is missing on your team?
2. Do certain team members lack strengths in specific areas that are hindering their contributions and weakening the team effort? You should be satisfied with the effort and effectiveness of each person. If not, think about ways to remedy the situation.
3. What value do you add to the team? You should be the catalyst that brings the team together and encourages it to tackle any issue. Do you make mistakes a learning experience or a time to hang the team out to dry? Are you the leader it expects and needs? Ask how you can improve your performance. Remember, not only are you leading your team,

but you are also showing it how it should provide leadership in its work teams.

Next, take stock of the work environment to ensure you are hiring, developing and the retaining the types of people needed now and in the future. Work should offer employees the opportunity to grow personally and professionally. Otherwise you won't get the most out of them, and you will lose the best ones.

The work setting is different than it was 50 years ago. Competing in the world economy means fewer certainties exist. Neither jobs nor businesses can be guaranteed for life. The 21st century mantra should be, "If you work with us, you will be given numerous opportunities to grow, and we will reward you accordingly. In this way, you and the business will prosper." This means that employees who find better jobs on the outside are congratulated for making their good fortune. You will experience a loss, but if you live by this philosophy, good recruits will replace them. Many of the good ones will stay and advance; some will leave but this is not a problem, as your business will be known as the place to work.

5 Things to Make the Work Environment a Place to Grow for Employees

1. Give people increasingly challenging assignments—the opportunity to stretch.
2. Give recognition when people do well and honest feedback when they come up short.

3. Provide purposeful formal and informal learning opportunities, particularly in-service training and attendance at conferences. If employees want to go to a particular training program, ask them to put in writing what they expect to learn. Upon return, ask about the take home value and how they plan to share that information with colleagues. Nothing reinforces new learning better than informing and teaching others.
4. Share information about the business. The more employees know about the business plan, your competitive position and the context of the business, the better the buy-in.
5. Show employees you care about their growth and development by listening to them, learning about their goals and aspirations and how they see the best way they can contribute. This is leading by walking around with open ears and an open mind.

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