



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

KILL OR CURE?

It occurred to me this week that HR people are the medical practitioners of the corporate world. Like doctors we get calls when something is out of sorts, we make follow-up house calls to make an initial assessment of the patient, we refer the problem to consultants when specialist treatment is needed, we recommend surgical procedures when a problem is deep-rooted, sometimes we have to amputate in extreme cases and inevitably not all our patients survive.

Let's face it some organisations are sick literally and figuratively. I reckon more than half of the organisations that I come into contact with have easily-diagnosable morale, productivity and motivation problems. They present with obvious and chronic symptoms yet 80% of them do not receive help for their condition.

In many cases, the illness is so severe that the patient is delusional. Various "problem employees" are identified, but they usually turn out to be symptoms or side-effects while the root cause of the organisation's problem is overlooked. I met a client the other day that has one of the biggest productivity problems imaginable but has managed to convince himself his problems have nothing to do with leadership or management -as one of my generation Y consultants would say – it so is!

Unfortunately, this is one of those occasions where getting the patient to the doctor is a major challenge. If, as a consultant I suggest a thorough examination, with the possibility of follow-up tests, I am sometimes suspected of trying to run up the bill. If an executive or manager does so, the person is accused of weakness or disloyalty.

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It always seems ironic that the companies investing the most in training, developing employee retention strategies, organisational design and other improvement initiatives are the ones least needing it. But that's the very reason that they are healthier than some of their competitors, prevention being much more effective than cure. Organisations who invest in training with a tick-box attitude by choosing the cheapest around with the lowest quality product offering are not even able to diagnose the problem, let alone cure it.

The examples are endless. Like me I am sure you have walked into many organisations and given thanks to God that you do not work there. I have seen too many sick organisations - organisations that have no life in them. People just come, put in an appearance to do their mandatory 40-some hours each week to pick up their salary at the end of the month.

Staff drag themselves into work, and can't wait until the clock hits quitting time. Their work life (and perhaps their entire life) has NO meaning, NO purpose, NO emotion, fervor or determination. They have nothing to look forward to, and nothing to feel rewarded for. Upper management routinely sends messages that inadvertently - or perhaps not so inadvertently in some cases - tell employees that they are easily replaceable, their co-workers are rivals, management distrusts them, customers are adversaries, and that there is a big gap between what is proclaimed and what is practiced. Sticking with the medical analogy these companies are on life support with two choices - major surgery, always risky, or simply switch off the machine.

If you are stuck in an environment like this what do you do? Okay you can be consumed with the cancer that bad management is, but that's desperately bad for the soul, or you can start strategising how as an employee you can turn it around. It starts with one person, and this person doesn't necessarily need to be the CEO. They begin to ask questions about their role in the company and what the company is all about. They encourage others to get involved. It becomes a whole new viral epidemic. People then want to know what the future of the company is, its mission and vision, to determine the organisation's cause.

Then, if allowed by management, they want to be active and participate in that cause (if that's what they believe in). You need everyone to become a corporate fitness freak, determined that every working part of the organisation is healthy and productive. Those who aren't interested in working out and working for the cause, are probably not the right people to work for the organisation.

They're going to continue to infect the body so you let them go, and replace them with others that want to sign up for the fitness programme. Now everybody has meaning, purpose, motive and determination. They look forward each day to contributing towards the organisation's health and success, they receive tangible rewards for their efforts and they feel all the better for it. Fever has been replaced by fervor and you have begun to effect a long-term cure!

It starts with you. You can only cure an illness if you keep a positive attitude and a passion for life. Where is your passion? Can you use your passion in your current role within your current organisation? If not, look for other places where you can. If there still is a potential fit with the organisation, start getting others involved and triggering their passion. Sometimes passion has always been there, but never inspired. Other times, passion was there but it died down and needs to be re-ignited. Find it! Use It! Help others do the same! Because when passion dies, so does everything else.

