

The Final Frontier

By David Huggins

It's often been said that small-to-medium-sized-businesses (SMEs) are the main engine that drives our economy in Canada, and I believe this is well proven. What isn't mentioned is that many leading-edge business **practices** have their origins in SMEs. It seems that larger corporations are not only slower to respond to change but they are frequently less adventurous.

Consider the rapidly expanding influence of Positive Psychology in the business sector. This is an idea whose time is most certainly overdue. Many businesses today are running with space age technologies, twenty-first century financing concepts, cutting-edge marketing - and Victorian age people-management practices! This makes no sense whatsoever.

The lack of full employee commitment, or 'engagement' as it's known, is costing the US economy in excess of \$350,000,000,000 a year. Only 27% of employees are fully committed to their role, and an astounding 17% are actively disengaged – working against the interests of their organizations. This reliable information has been gathered by the Gallup organization. Can we ignore it?

The cold, hard truth is that most of today's practicing managers are simply unaware of the reasonable expectations of their workforce. They strive to make production targets using outdated supervisory strategies thereby losing on two fronts – unmet goals and dissatisfied employees. This is like trying to chop through a massive log using the blunt edge of an axe!

Here's the challenge. Practices that do work well for both the organization and the individual are simple, elegant and easy to master. However, we need to focus on them and make a concerted effort to change the way we traditionally do things, and this is a real challenge. Yet, it makes absolute sense to change, for if we don't, we'll surely lose credibility as employers.

How can we get started? Fundamental changes that will take us more than eighty percent of the way to the mutually desirable goal of meaningful contribution likely will include these five issues:

- **Focusing on solutions versus problems.** Not only does a problem focus often fail to deliver the expected results, it's demoralizing. Defining the problem first does not guarantee us a solution. Identifying desired solutions first liberates innovation, opens up initiatives, encourages contributions and delivers beyond expectations – need I say more?
- **Tap into natural energies.** While it's important to use individual mental / cognitive competencies – knowledge, skills, experience and memories – it's even more important to apply passions and preferences. Over sixty percent of people in business are in an inappropriate role to use their native abilities and interests – this is non-sensical.
- **Foster a learning organization.** Freud stated that we're either growing or dying – is there really an option here? If our employees look and act like the 'living dead' perhaps it's because we are not giving them incentives and opportunities to grow in terms of internal value, self regard and to realize their potentials. Invest in people growth.

- **Make decisions using complete information.** This means recognizing people's competencies **and** their strengths and how these combine to create real and resilient contributions. We expect people to put their 'heart' into their work but we never determine what's in their hearts – emotional factors carry little weight in our decisions.
- **Measure success by 'engagement'.** Those who will lead our enterprises in the future need to be at least as passionate and committed as we are today. They may not be as knowledgeable or skilled, exposed or experienced, but time and opportunity will resolve these aspects. On the other hand, if their 'engine' isn't running today, why should we expect it to be running tomorrow?

So, hire and promote those who demonstrate personal commitment and unqualified engagement. It's considerably easier to steer those who are already moving under their own steam than to have to push people to achieve. Knowledge and experience can be gained, admittedly at a price, but the passion needed to make meaningful contributions is either present - or it's not. No matter what else you might be able to do, you cannot insert it!

Your future is in **their** hands, so decide today that you will work fully and only with the best – those who desire to make dedicated contributions to mutual success. Consider the realities of your 'team' today. How many are on the right bus, regardless of its eventual destination? How many of them do you want as fellow-travelers no matter how difficult and trying the journey? What could you do today to retain those with a winning attitude, and how might you support them to increase their personal commitment?

What one thing could you do – right now?

*Author David Huggins, is president of Andros Consultants Limited, a firm of organizational development specialists which offers the **Polaris Program – the most effective tutoring and coaching program for emerging leaders and managers**. If you've enjoyed these ideas, you may wish to visit our web site www.polarisprogram.com and to try our free monthly newsletter "**Polaris Digest**".*