

Fostering a sense of shared values

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It is reported that the new Dubai Metro is to operate the world's longest system of unmanned trains and the RTA has wisely launched a major brand-building campaign, promoting Dubai Metro as 'My Metro', aiming to foster a warm relationship between the system operator and its customers.

This idea of personalising a corporate entity is a well-proven motivational strategy, encouraging loyalty and commitment. It gives a sense of pride and what I call 'notional ownership' to employees. Even if one can't really afford to pay more, people will give more if they feel this sense of ownership, where the corporate entity is seen as something more than just a vehicle for investors. And of course, in the present climate, many employers may have to try calling on their staff for extra effort, without necessarily any monetary reward.

Early in my career, I was often brought in as a mediator in the motor industry, whose production lines often operated in conditions that were disadvantageous to good labour relations.

At one plant, there was a young trade-union official whose family had a long-running feud with the management, apparently dating back to a shop-floor accident about thirty years earlier.

While trying to mediate between the parties, I quickly saw that the dispute could be traced back to his own emotional background, where the management was perceived as the enemy.

Week by week, I expounded this theme of notional ownership -that the company was a kind of family who ought to be pulling together for the common benefit of management and staff. He appeared to respond in a non-committal way. But I must have been getting through to him, because one day, while my own car was being serviced, I asked him where I could phone for a taxi, and he unexpectedly offered me a lift into town. As we followed the long perimeter-fence, he suddenly caught sight of two teenagers vandalising a sign with the firm's name and logo on it.

You never saw anyone leap out of a car so quickly, and in no time those two lads were running for their lives. That reaction was clearly signalling 'my firm', and his aggression was at last being channelled in a positive direction.

That encouraged me to formalise the proposition into a memorable four-part acronym - C.A.R.E. - which I have used ever since.

The first is 'communication' and entails maintaining two-way dialogue, through approachability and an open-door policy.

Then follows 'attitude' which recognises that happy and fulfilled employees feel more committed to the firm.

Third is 'recognition' which involves showing active appreciation of achievement, through both financial and other incentives.

Then comes 'empowerment' which entails unlocking hidden potential, to cultivate a 'We' culture that builds powerful teams.

That simple formula has remained my mantra through many counselling and training programmes delivered to organisations large and small around the world. Perhaps you may like to keep it in mind and

use it with my compliments.

Key points: Notional ownership

- Involve your workforce with an inclusive policy of notional ownership
- A family feeling of pulling together can strengthen teams in the long-term
- Remember: Communication, Attitude, Recognition & Empowerment!

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