

The perfect boss

Good people management requires a positive attitude and a variety of skill sets

Creating a healthy workplace culture means taking an entirely fresh view of employees' talents and how to deploy them more effectively. Organisations have to move away from an over-reliance on systems and processes, and adopt approaches that are more successful in engaging employees.

It is vital for managers to engage with their teams, but it has to be recognised that managers cannot always be all things to all people. Sometimes they have to be authoritarian and at other times a 'good listener'.

TEAM EMPOWERMENT

Managers need a comprehensive toolkit of skills and an 'open door' policy to encourage a two-way dialogue between themselves and the members of their team. It is necessary to get 'buy-in' from their team in order to establish loyalty and commitment in return. While it may not be possible to pay more wages, praise and recognition will encourage employees into 'wanting' to do more for their manager and to give of their best.

Line and middle managers reportedly spend an average of 1.6 days a month dealing with underperformers, yet middle management does not always have the people skills to manage large teams. Identifying the needs of individual managers and providing coaching is therefore vital if they are to fulfil their role and provide regular constructive feedback (and not just focus on attempting to remedy employees' weaknesses).

Seeking to understand the reasons underlying poor performance and address the causes is an important part of a manager's role. It is necessary to ensure that performance contracts are two-way and include an agreement as to what a manager is going to contribute to enable the employee to be successful.

Effective managers will stop focusing on the past at the expense of the future, and be accountable for the climate they create. Spending more time exploring individual needs and career aspirations is a key element in securing employee engagement and the retention of high performers. Managers should also review their approach and make sure that what they measure encourages the behaviours and performance they want to see.

Empowering managers to manage staff and take responsibility for their performance review is a day-to-day responsibility. This also means handling the team as though it were a human entity – encouraging the 'feel good' factor – and allocating roles and responsibilities correctly.

GOOD COMMUNICATION

The culture of the company has to be right for communications to be effective. It is important to have a two-way dialogue between employer and employees; between the CEO and the Board; and between the Board and line managers.

Effective communication has been found to be a weakness in many organisations – from the largest to the smallest – with insufficient time and training given to the subject. Middle managers often find themselves promoted to a position with responsibility for a team without the necessary communication skills to manage that team effectively.

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Listening and non-verbal communication are equally as important as verbalising issues. The careful listener can often identify potential stressors at an early stage and manage them accordingly – reducing the impact on the organisation. Key examples of these skills include:

- Inspiration through leadership
- Establishing a two-way dialogue
- Effective networking
- Non-verbal cues that can stimulate revealing questions or answers
- Formal study of body language and its rich, powerful vocabulary
- How to use silence – unspoken dialogue that may be full of meaning
- Effective listening as an active problem-solving and team-building skill.

THE CREATIVE PULSE

Creativity is the lifeblood of any organisation. It leads to innovation which in turn leads to competitive edge. All too often, however, creative thinking is seen as the preserve of departments such as sales and marketing, or R&D. Everyone has the capacity to come up with good ideas, but this means being prepared to step into the

unknown and dispense with the accepted rules of business. It is time to challenge conventional wisdom and not to let old or outdated processes and procedures obstruct the ways of new thinking.

PRAISE AND REWARD

Nothing can be more important than giving praise for a job well done. Regular appraisal identifies strengths and weaknesses and allows for assessment of continuing professional development and on-the-job training.

Appraisal is a two-way process that enables the manager and employee to agree targets for performance and have a plan to work to. While appraisal should be an ongoing process, it is also necessary to have a formal timetable for review.

Being recognised as an important cog in the business machine is almost as important as the reward on offer. Recognition and reward have to be commensurate with the task, but undervaluing skills at all levels can lead to low productivity and poor morale. Providing benefit packages over and above the basic salary is another way of expressing recognition and enhancing reward.

To be effective within an organisation individuals need to be aware of the corporate goals and if possible have a stake in achieving them. Bonuses and performance-related pay are huge incentives for employees at all levels.

CREATING HIGH MORALE

The morale of an organisation is also fundamental to its success. High morale suggests a well motivated and energised workforce that is keen to succeed. Employees will be committed to meeting, and even exceeding, targets when morale is high and it is therefore an essential ingredient for sustainable success.

SHARING COMMON GOALS

If you think a goal is achievable then the chances are it is. Positive attitude is everything in a successful organisation. The moment negativity creeps in, creativity and motivation go out of the window.

Positive affirmations from the boardroom to the shop floor give an organisation every chance of succeeding and meeting its targets. A cohesive team will also have common goals and a positive attitude. Team members will support each other – and the business.

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