Engaging Excellence

By Gail Ostrishko MS, LPC

Organizations don't build business, people do. So investing in your people is an investment in your most valuable asset. Record rates of unemployment, economic uncertainty, and skyrocketing sources of stress, make employee engagement more critical and more challenging than ever. It is no secret that retaining existing employees is much more cost effective than recruiting and training new ones, but how do we do that? Engaging excellence is a collaborative effort, requiring a culture, and a climate conducive to maximizing human potential. It is a shared responsibility and a reciprocal process rooted in positive relationships.

Did you know that people will stay in jobs they do not like if they enjoy the people? And they will leave jobs they love if the relationships are too stressful. Research suggests that having a good friend at work increases job satisfaction and productivity by as much as 50%. Results are rooted in relationships!

'People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.'

People need to feel connected, committed and valued in order to embrace and engage excellence in themselves and in others. People are committed to relationships and experiences that hold value for them. Values are the core connectors that keep individuals and organizations in alignment with long term goals and vision. Without shared values, individuals have no reason to connect or commit

Identifying and maximizing strengths and natural abilities in an excellent avenue for unleashing excellence and propagating passion. Strong leadership with a clear structure for supporting and encouraging excellence is the glue that grounds individual and collective capacity for creative collaboration.

Identify and Maximize Strengths and Natural Abilities

It is no secret that we are all more productive when we work from our natural abilities. It is the difference between being 'in the zone', and swimming up stream.

Natural abilities take far less energy than learned skills, and most of the time, we enjoy using our natural abilities. Gallup

research suggests that less than half of us feel we have daily opportunities to do what we do best.

Even more alarming: 75-85% of American workers are dissatisfied in their jobs! Consider that within the context of 10 % unemployment and it is no wonder our society is literally dying of heart DIS ease! Expressing who you are through what you do takes conscious effort.

"It takes a lot of courage to grow up and be who you really are" -ee cummings

Getting the right people in the right roles takes time, and requires commitment to determining what strengths individuals bring to the job, and who is best suited for specific roles and responsibilities.

Organizations don't build business, people do!

Wise organizations are increasingly committed to helping people understand themselves in order to be more conscious contributors.

Assessment tools abound, but all are not created equal! My favorites include the Gallup Strengths Finder and the Highlands Ability Battery. The Strengths Finder is a fairly simple, inexpensive preference indicator. You select from pairs of words describing yourself and the report reveals your perception through identification of 5 signature strengths. The online key code comes in the book, ***Now Discover Your Strengths***.

The **Highlands Ability Battery** measures natural abilities through a series of 19 timed work samples.

After completing the ability battery, participants immediately access their results via a comprehensive 30+ page report, followed by an interpretive feedback conference with a licensed Highlands affiliate.

Self awareness is crucial, and instruments abound. It is important to select one consistently so everyone has a shared language and understanding of how to recognize and maximize individual and collective wisdom.

Lead People, Manage Things

Leadership is a significant contributing factor to the culture and the awareness of strengths based thinking. Distinguishing between leadership and management is also crucial to cultivating an environment where employees feel engaged and appreciated. While there is value in both roles in all organizations, most

have a tendency to use these words interchangeably and to see the roles as one in the same.

In the corporate culture, people who are good at their jobs tend to be promoted to roles of leadership and/or management, thus climbing the proverbial corporate ladder. This is not always an effective approach. Just because someone is good at their job does not mean they will excel at leading people or managing projects. In many professions, quite the contrary is true, so people find themselves removed from what they enjoyed and excelled at, only to be plagued with human resource issues they are not prepared to address.

Provide Structure and Support

Last but not least, your organization must be structured in a manner that:

- Allows people to do their best work
- Reduces redundancy and layers of bureaucracy
- Gives individuals responsibility and authority
- Holds people accountable for decisions and actions
- Recognizes and rewards effort and accomplishments

Doing your best work requires clear role clarity. Employees need to know what is expected of them and how they will be evaluated. They need input into the roles, goals and elements of evaluations so they can be proactive and feel a sense of control over their work and their opportunities for advancement.

Redundancy and excessive bureaucracy are not only frustrating but they are costly. They rob employees of power and control over their work and zap valuable energy. Simplify and streamline business processes and best practices.

Employees need to feel a sense of control over their work and authority in their area of expertise. This authority not only helps inside the organization, but it breeds confidence with your external customers as well, as they see confidence and authority on the front line.

Accountability is crucial to all organizations of any type. People need to be held responsible for the decisions and actions they take, and everyone needs to see consistency and congruence. Not holding individuals accountable damages relationships and reduces commitment.

People must feel rewarded and recognized for their efforts. Monetary compensation is not enough, and remains in short supply. Research consistently confirms that a sense of connection, accomplishment and appreciation is much more effective long term than cold cash. Many organizations have discovered that offering flexible schedules, the option of telecommuting and time off with pay provides significant reward and recognition without reducing the bottom line. Most people are even more productive when exercising these options. Individuals need to see opportunities for advancement, which may be in the form of a lateral move.

They need to be compensated for their efforts as well as accomplishments, and there must be a clear and consistent protocol for addressing poor performance.

Organizations don't build business, people do! Your people are your business. Relationships with your internal and external customers are the primary drivers determining your bottom line, and the primary tools for fostering organizational excellence. Effective leaders engage, empower and equip employees in a manner that fosters ownership, accountability, productivity and retention. Engaging excellence is a reciprocal process and a shared responsibility.

Gail Ostrishko is a creative catalyst for building relationships and organizations from the inside out. Consistently noted for her high energy and infectious enthusiasm, Gail works with individuals and organizations to get the right people in the right roles by identifying and maximizing individual and collective strengths and creative capacity. Grounded in years of experience as a counselor, facilitator, speaker, author and coach, Gail utilizes the state of the art **Highlands Ability Battery** as a foundation for encouraging people to pursue their passion.