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Managing Employees for Optimum Business Results



Mr. Kishu Gomez
Managing Director/CEO
Chevron Lubricants Lanka

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1. Shaping Behavior of Employees for Continuous Improvement

Given the inherent culture and habits of Sri-Lankan leaders across different fields, it's fair to say that most Sri-Lankan leaders are at the two extreme ends; either too nice or too bossy. Both have their specific pros and cons. You would agree that there are more cons than pros. It doesn't work in today's environment. Varying performance environment and the mindset of people demand that you keep moving on the axis to improve organizational performance while helping the employees. This is an art that needs to be developed in leaders across all levels. Art however cannot be acting oriented. Acting is easy but being authentic for long term credibility and respect as a leader is difficult. If you want to be an effective leader you have no choice but to do the later.

Authentic Appreciation for Motivation

Appreciation does not mean that one should accept everything and everybody and be inauthentic about it. Inauthentic appreciation is picked up very quickly by the employees and it damages relationships instead of building them. Authentic appreciation, on the other hand, motivates people to go beyond their own limits. It's about taking a genuine interest in people and the business for well balanced accountability.

ISSN: 2345-9980

Focus on What Works not What Doesn't

It is easy for us to find fault with each other and see what is missing or wrong. Unfortunately, focusing on what does not work only leads to repeated failure. You look around; we have some leaders in every field who get fun out of finding fault and fault only. This has to change. My experience has convinced me that catching somebody doing mistakes leads them to make more mistakes, whereas catching them doing something right encourages them to be right more often. Of course it's your role to do both authentically with the right intention. Appreciating a person boosts their morale and makes them feel good that somebody is paying attention to them and hence they continue to do what brought them appreciation in the first place.

Appreciate others to the Extent that You Appreciate Yourself

Unfortunately, most often, we grow up discovering our limits by being told what not to do and what doesn't work more than being encouraged to explore what is possible. We have to 'unlearn' our patterns of identifying what does not work and intentionally concentrate on appreciating what works however small that may be.

I can only appreciate others to the extent that I appreciate myself. So appreciation is also about self acceptance. We rarely appreciate who we are and what we receive because of our conditioned expectations. It is possible for us to come from an attitude of 'never enough' and such attitude is quite transparent to others even though we might be blind to it ourselves.

ISSN: 2345-9980

Stretching beyond Your Own Limits for Appreciation

Most people are quite comfortable with who they are and what they got and never explore beyond their own comfort zones. In such cases, they may never discover their real capacity and depend on others to tell what their boundaries are and do not participate in anything that makes them uncomfortable. We can operate as catalysts with each other to identify our self-imposed limits and examine the appropriateness of those limits in the current context. Curiosity, collaboration, empathy, and appreciation provide the impetus for people to engage in an activity that is personally challenging and, hopefully, discover their own untapped potential. Such exploration can only be done in supportive environments and appreciative relationships. While nobody can change anybody else, an empathetic, appreciative person who is aware of his circumstances will definitely make him think again about his mindset and he would be willing to stretch a bit beyond his own comfort zone to explore what is out there. You know the outcome that can be achieved; so go for it.

2. Mix and Match Team Members for Business Synergy

Business leaders need high levels of interpersonal skills to achieve top team performance in today's pressured operating environment. Learning and developing the skills of knowing when I how to shift ideas and views to ensure you get the best out of others to drive results.

Leader's job is to use the power of employees to create value for the organization, not his own power only. Most leaders have their egos and not willing to listen to the other's view point. Culturally

ISSN: 2345-9980

for us, learning from others is perceived to be cheap thing to do. But the recipe for success is team work.

Look at You First When Things Go Wrong

Successful business leaders need to achieve top results from their teams. Today, no individual can produce results in an organizational environment but teams. To get the best out of people, look at what you do with people that work, and how to improve what does not work. So it's about learning from success and failure for continuous improvement. When results are below expectations, resist the inner urge to blame others. Instead, recognize your part of the results they produced. This could include things you did not do or did not do well enough to achieve the desired results. Imagine alternate approaches that might work better next time. For example, a colleague does not seem to listen to your comments. On reflection, you realize that you told them only what you wanted, not how they should go about doing it.

Cultural Differences, a Big Barrier

The differences between individuals are much bigger than the apparent differences which you notice easily. Creating an organizational culture with a common vision, strategy, practices, values and ethics should take precedence over individual culture. This is the biggest challenge the business leaders have today with widening cultural gaps due to emerging sub-cultures that are complex in nature.

ISSN: 2345-9980

Real World vs. Our Your Own – Consider 3 Positions to Understand

People often talk about the ‘real world’ and forget that each one of us live in our own world. Learn to see situations from other people’s view point. So should typically have 3 positions to base your decision; 1) your own, 2) other’s and 3) neutral or impartial observer position. 3rd position is essentially, an outsider’s view. This will help foam a well balanced perspective to base upon the best decision possible. When you are faced with a difficulty, explore all three positions.

Describe Your Behavior in One Word to Discover YOU

Imagine a situation with a colleague who you find difficult to manage. Choose a word to describe how you experience the colleague’s behavior as difficult, for example, lethargic. Think how they may see your behavior as difficult. Choose another word describe your behavior. Imagine yourself in that situation and notice how you feel. You may be more frustrated than you realized. Focus on the person’s body language and imagine being in their position. Notice any feeling they might have you were not aware of, such as anxiety. Then, step back and ask yourself “what is the best way to handle this”?

Bringing Personality Traits Together

Two people with different mental models can find it hard to communicate, and this can be damaging in business. Learn to recognize different patterns of behavior in your team members, and work with these differences to maximize performance. Try to differentiate between people with different personalities in your

ISSN: 2345-9980

own team. Improve performance by ensuring that people's characteristics fit their job scope. Make sure people's natural personality preferences are well-matched to the tasks that they perform.

3. Turning Strategy into Performance

In today's world of rapid, disruptive change, strategy can't be separate from execution—it has to emerge from execution. You have to continually adjust your strategy to fit new realities. But if your organization isn't set up to be fast on its feet, you could easily go the way of *Blockbuster* or *Borders*. As companies all over the world concentrate on revisiting, revising, and remaking their strategies, they forget the next step: making sure the strategy happens. So it turns out that billions of dollars are spent on brilliant ideas--but not brilliant results.

Strategy making is an elegant activity which engages the top management. It's a sophisticated process of collecting and analyzing data, generating insights, and identifying smart ways forward. Done in an academic fashion, tight logic in fluent language is the only glue needed to hold ideas together. Executives buy into the plan. The strategists, confident in their intellectual prowess, quietly recede into the background. Then the conflicts begin. Execution is a minefield. The clean and elegant logic of strategy gets dirty in the real world. Cross functional priorities clash. Speed is questioned, timelines get blown, and decisions stall. Communication breaks down and the blaming environment sets in. It's never a question of *if* these problems will happen; it's a question of when and to what degree.

ISSN: 2345-9980

Get into the Same Camp

Strategists and executors are in two camps and getting into one camp is the way to bridge these two worlds. It's common sense. Unfortunately, it's far from common practice. What typically happens is an awkward hand-off between the two. They don't engage the executors early and ask, "How will this actually work?" The executors contribute to the trouble as well. Often they don't truly understand the thinking behind the strategy. They take it at face value and don't ask enough tough questions. When things fall apart, each points a finger at the other side. Organizations today need to constantly adapt to create and maintain competitive advantage and the marketers have to go beyond the traditional roll to seek new ways to achieve strategic organizational change.

Create the Culture of Execution

The basic step for a company to follow to become more focused on execution or implementation is to create a culture of execution. How does one create such a culture? Let's look at some basic facts. First, it's a fact that culture affects behavior. An organizational culture include values, prescriptions on how to act, how to treat others, how to react to performance shortfalls, how to compete, etc., and these have a profound impact on behavior. A related fact, however, also must be kept in mind: Behavior, over time, affects organizational culture. How, then, does one create a desired culture? By creating behaviors and performance programs that become an integral part of an organization's way of doing things. By creating and reinforcing behaviors and performance programs that affect the very essence of how organizations act

ISSN: 2345-9980

and compete, Create a culture of execution by developing and reinforcing behaviors that affect culture. It is important to design, reward and otherwise support the right behaviors, those that are vital to making strategy work, in order to create and nurture a culture of execution.

Ask yourself, why strategy execution or implementation is viewed as a lower-level task in an organization? Why assume that execution is a quick, one-shot decision or action and not a journey? Why don't we believe that Strategy execution is a process similar to strategy making? Is the organizational structure geared for effective execution? More importantly, how does one create a culture of execution?

Strategy and execution are both about people. To create strategy we need innovative people and to execute we need leaders. Everything else is secondary.

4. Have a 'First Page' to get 'Everyone on the Same Page'

One of the prime attributes of a successful leader is the ability to get everyone on the same page in respect of overall vision, strategy and execution plan a company has of its future. This task is more abstract than the nuts-and-bolts, day-to-day aspects of a company's operations.

Getting everyone on the same page can result only by establishing the understanding that every employee is ultimately responsible for the overall success of the company. Each employee must be led to an understanding that everything he or she does is vital not

ISSN: 2345-9980

only for his or her own job stability but also for the company and its customers.

When teams are NOT on the same page, things go wrong. Time, money and resources are wasted. Frustration builds and spreads throughout the team, and everything slows down. Mistakes are made. Quality takes a nosedive. Customer loyalty is compromised. Business partners are confused. Blaming, finger pointing, justification and throwing people under the bus emerge as a new skill set. Yes, we have all lived what I just described – and most of us prefer never to live it again.

It's a Frequent Challenge not a One-Off

Contrary to the above, when teams ARE on the same page, things go right. Time, money and resources are maximized. Morale is high, and work moves along quickly and efficiently. Mistakes rarely occur because everyone is knowledgeable, committed and accountable to the processes, procedures and systems – so much so that innovation perpetuates constant improvement. Businesses keep evolving, operating environment go thru dramatic changes following natural cycles. So getting everyone on the same page and keeping them that way is a frequent challenge.

Stop talking about everyone getting on the same page if you don't have a page for everyone to get on. Too many leaders set themselves and their teams up for failure simply because projects, expectations and outcomes were poorly – or never – defined. Creating the right outcomes and winning in business can only be achieved through a coordinated game plan that everyone

ISSN: 2345-9980

understands. So, the next time you say, “We need to get on the same page,” I hope someone steps up and asks, “May I have a copy of that page?” I your leaders doesn’t have one he is not a good leader.

Begin at the Top

Getting everyone on the same page begins at the top. The most frustrating aspect of coaching leaders is their propensity to not play the same game they want everyone else to play. It’s impossible to get everyone in a company on the same page starting from the middle. That is a guaranteed recipe for confusion and frustration. It must start at the top.

Telling the team, hey, let’s has a meeting so we can all get on the same page.” Just like getting and staying physically fit takes working out and eating well every day, so does getting on the same page. One meeting is nothing more than the just players’ room speech before the game kicks off. Then it’s charging out on the field with playbook in hand. It’s huddling before every play. It’s about execution and achieving excellence. If you can accomplish that in one meeting, I want to write a book about you being the greatest leader in the history of business.

5. Rewarding Quality Results vs Quality Decisions – Leaders Dilemma

Managing for results — pay for performance schemes and the like — are increasingly practiced by the modern organizations for business reasons but this principle can fundamentally be flawed if that is the only criterion for evaluating managers. But the counter

ISSN: 2345-9980

argument would be decision has no tangible value but the positive outcome.

People, including managers and business leaders, typically equate the quality of a decision with the quality of the result. When people observe a good result, they conclude that they made a good decision. Likewise, when a bad result is observed, people conclude that a bad decision was made. This is not true. Decisions and results are two different things. Time elapses between a decision and the realization of its result. Decisions are made at a specific moment in time; afterwards, people implement these decisions, and the result is observed in the future. The future is uncertain: there are no facts about the future, and nobody has a crystal ball. In the future, events can happen that managers and organizations cannot control. Also, events can happen that managers could not foresee. Such events can cause good decisions to have a bad result — and vice versa. Therefore, the quality of the result is not an indicator of decision quality, and the result is irrelevant as a measure of decision quality

Bad results Stifle Creativity

A blame culture triggered by bad results stifles experimentation, innovation or trial and error. If leaders do not tolerate failure and error in our business innovations, they will kill the prospect of anyone taking any initiative. Since business activity is the primary engine for personal income growth, value creation and societal economic development, an organizational culture built on blame and punishment has implications beyond the boundaries of our any one business. Taken to national proportions, a blaming

ISSN: 2345-9980

culture inhibits societal growth, development and evolution. Managing for results leads to crisis, at the least; it can lead to bankruptcy, at the worst.

Being accountable only for results may not be the right standard for performance. Of course, people must be held accountable for what they do in a business context; but they need to be held accountable for the right things. They need to be held accountable for things under their control that is, operating with a good process of high quality. They should not be held accountable for uncontrollable events. Conversely, if business leaders only want good results, it is easy to understand that, ultimately, any process to achieve good results will become acceptable — even an illegal process. This is yet another way in which managing for results can become the origin of crisis and bankruptcy. A manager who achieves an excellent result but, in the process of achieving it, has de-motivated his team is clearly not a good leader.

Reward more Long Term Performance

Companies typically do two things to achieve, on average, better results. First, they implement a good process. Managers can learn to become better business executives. They can learn the process of decision making, learn how to be better at execution and build their business via the knowledge, experience and informed intuition that is inherent in decision making and execution. Out of this, managers will find that they are becoming better, more thoughtful business leaders — more aware and better informed about what they are doing.

ISSN: 2345-9980

Being compensated only for results doesn't measure one's true contributions to the organization. It is possible that bad managers using wrong processes will sometimes enjoy good results. But their luck will run out eventually. Therefore, in the long run, it is necessary for organizations to evaluate the quality of a manager's decision-making process over the span of his or her career. Over time, managers will make many decisions and take many actions. Organizations should therefore reward on the longer-term performance achievements of managers. It may seem controversial, but we firmly believe that even managers with bad results should be rewarded — if they have used a good decision-making process. Keeping in mind though that good decisions are for good results, so onus is on you to ensure that good decisions deliver good results leaving the luck aside.

6. Control or be Controlled; make the Right Choice

I have repeatedly been saying that the world is becoming a harder place to live. We have no escape. We are not insulated from any of the global issues.

From a local perspective, you have been hearing about a string unexpected economic and non-economic issues. If you are like most other people, you are probably spending more time worrying about the recent developments having a direct or indirect impact on your life.

You must be highly worried about the currency devaluation and its implications on your business, consequent inflationary issues, job security, escalation of energy cost, Geneva issue, rising taxes,

ISSN: 2345-9980

future of your children, even the weather – it has been terrible, hasn't it been?. Some things we can control, others we clearly cannot.

Convert Negative Thoughts into Positive Thoughts

One of the key things you must practice when managing such uncertainty, ambiguity and anxiety is to understand the issue in context and deciding if it is something you can do something about. It's inevitable that any issue regardless of whether they are related or otherwise you tend to worry- that's natural human behaviour so let it be. But the important factor is that your life has to go on. You still need to achieve your goals in life - to do this you got to navigate these challenges with a single focus in mind. So how can you do it? Correct understanding of the issue is vital to distinguish between what is impacting you and what is not – and decide what you can control and what you can't. Ability to turn the negative thoughts into positive thoughts is a must to deal with any challenge. I know this idea sounds simplistic, but practicing this technique is hard but when effectively practiced, it can alleviate a great deal of unnecessary anxiety and stress. We have a fair share of our own personal problems and we end up spending a lot of time and energy to resolve them. The worst thing that can happen to us is spending time and energy on issues we cannot control no matter if these issues have an impact on you or not. If you cannot control just be aware and align yourself - that is the most sensible thing to do.

ISSN: 2345-9980

Directing Energy towards what you can Control

Easy to say, HARD TO DO! Our passion for our work makes it more difficult to worry selectively. Why? The more passionate you are, the more protective and perfection-driven you become. Any concern becomes exaggerated just based on your optimistic vision being obstructed. Regardless of whether or not you have influence, you will want to tackle every problem as it emerges.

This tendency is dangerous. Your energy becomes fractured as you start to obsess over details and situations that are beyond your control. Ultimately, your ideas and plans suffer.

It's said that generally 90 percent of the things people worry about are beyond their control. You can do your own assessment and figure out your own percentage is. You may be surprised with your own realization. The key to maintaining a positive attitude in life is to know the difference.

Positive Self Talk is a Good Practice to have

How many times have you been stuck in traffic, being in queues at the government institutions? You began to feel angry, stressed and uncomfortably over anxious? Probably more times than you care to think about, but some of these are things you have no control over, so lighten up, take some deep breaths, and tell yourself, "I am in control over my feelings, and I will not let this situation beat me down. I am in charge of how I feel. I am calm and relaxed."

ISSN: 2345-9980

This will take practice obviously, but once you start to get this, it will make a world of difference. When you think about how much damage these unnecessary stressful situations harm our bodies, raise our blood pressure, increase frown wrinkles, ruin our day, it is not worth it, and it is a battle you want to take on with positive self talk.

Spend your thoughts on things you can control and think thoughts that bring a smile to your face, rather than an ugly frown.

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