



Digging Out From The “Talent Hole”

By Pam Butterfield

Are you a Connecticut business owner or organizational leader with an *unenthusiastic* work force? If so, you are not alone. A Gallup poll found that *only 26 percent of United States workers are loyal and productive*; 55 percent are “just putting in their time” (i.e. not engaged or productive); and 19 percent are actively miserable and spreading their discontent (i.e. *really* not engaged or productive).

Some of today’s workers have been reluctant to leave their current jobs *physically* because of a lack of better opportunities in the marketplace but they have left *mentally*. They are disengaged, less productive, and biding their time. And they’re still on the payroll.

Many businesses have difficulty obtaining the kinds of results from its employees to have stellar company performance. And yet, some organizations do get *more* and *better* results from their workforce and are well positioned to compete for talent in the future. What makes them different? They adhere to the following eight building blocks for becoming a preferred employer:

1. **Strategic Focus and Direction** – In these companies, leaders make the time to set direction and be strategic. Without strategic focus and direction, management will spend valuable time fighting fires and “herding cats,” not moving their organization forward. And customers are a key focus of their strategy. The #1 goal of any business is to attract and retain customers. If a company can’t attract and retain the best types of customers and the right number of each customer type, it won’t have sustainable financial strength, and it won’t be a great place to work! Strategic and customer focus are necessities.
2. **Metrics and Accountability** – Preferred employers measure organizational and individual performance (and reward accordingly). Since their #1 goal is to attract and retain customers, they tie measurements to what is important, from the customers’ perspective. Spending precious company resources (money and time) to make your company a “great place to work” must balance customer needs, company needs, and employee needs. Without this balance, there is a danger the organization will become inwardly focused and “employee-centric” instead of outwardly focused and “customer-centric”.

3. **Senior Leadership's Commitment and Ability To Change** - Leaders in these companies are compelled to improve, make time for planning, commit resources, and take action to improve. They must want to obtain more and better results from their organizations, effectively deal with barriers that consistently impede efforts to improve, and be committed to achieving business excellence.
4. **Management Development** – At preferred employers, managers and supervisors (especially first-line supervisors) have a significant impact on employee engagement and retention. A manager needs to learn how to be a good boss. Studies indicate that the relationship employees have with their immediate supervisor affects the length of their stay and that one of the main reasons people quit is their supervisor's behavior.
5. **Strategies to Attract, Develop, Motivate and Retain Excellent Talent** – Leadership and management understand the specific strategies that lead to a high performing, engaged, and productive workforce. These strategies exist. They work. Most are very practical, and can be implemented quickly. A company does not need a large, complex program to keep good people.
6. **Independence** - In order for a company to improve “its own ability to improve,” it must not become permanently dependent on outside help. Initially, support from external resources such as coaches and consultants may be required to initiate changes. But it is important that people within the company independently develop new behaviors and use the processes and tools provided by external resources.
7. **Practice** - Organizations don't change; people do. Changing how you behave takes time, and it takes practice. Just like anyone learning something new, you will make mistakes. But that's OK. People need to be able to practice and develop their skills and abilities, learning from both their successes and their mistakes.
8. **Coaching/Feedback** Individual and team coaching and feedback work well to support continuous on-the-job learning and forward movement of individuals and the organization.

These elements may look straightforward, but implementing them isn't easy. Moreover, initiating change is a process, not an event. Personally, I don't know of a quick fix or silver bullet, although it certainly is possible to get some immediate wins. But that should not deter you from the hard work of becoming a preferred employer. Being able to attract, engage, and retain excellent talent represents tomorrow's opportunities and competitive advantage. If you're doing business in Connecticut today—and plan to in the future—becoming an employer of choice is a strategic imperative.

10 Ways to Become an Employer of Choice

1. Devise an excellent recruiting process that not only identifies talent, but also positions your company as an employer of choice.
2. Give your new employees a comprehensive orientation.
3. Assess your existing people to make sure their current skills and desires are deployed appropriately.
4. Give your supervisors training and coaching on how to manage their people, in good times and in bad.
5. Define performance goals for your organization and for all employees. Then hold people accountable for performance against the plan.
6. Pay attention to star performers and average performers alike. Don't notice your steady, reliable people only after they leave.
7. Focus on creating and nurturing a "great place to work" culture.
8. Instill pride in your organization—its mission, products, and people.
9. Recognize, value, and respect your employees.
10. Provide constant opportunities to do meaningful, challenging work.

For more information, or to discuss your needs or those of your organization, please feel free to call us at: (860) 643-4744 or visit us at: www.BusinessSuccessTools.Biz