THE RESOURCE

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Labor & Industrial INSIGHTS® Magazine

3 STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING HOURLY WORKERS

INSIDE

From The CEO

THE RESOURCE

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Best Regards,

Kathy Hartung

Kathy Hartung, CEO

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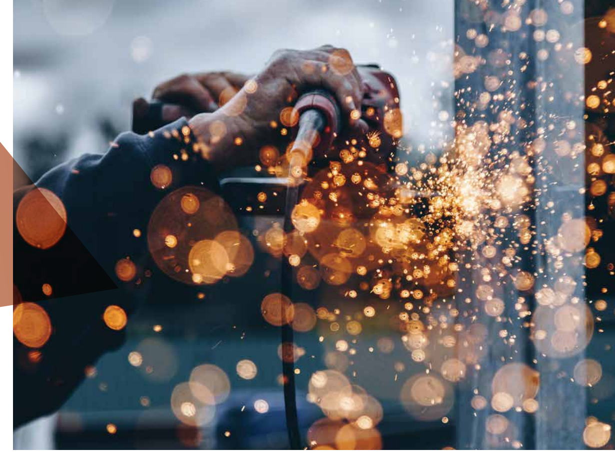
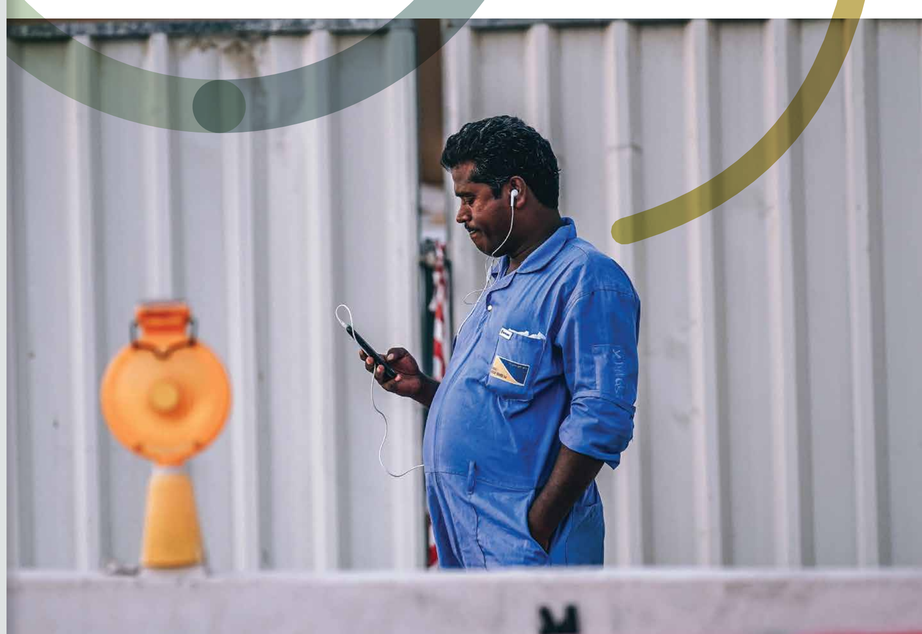
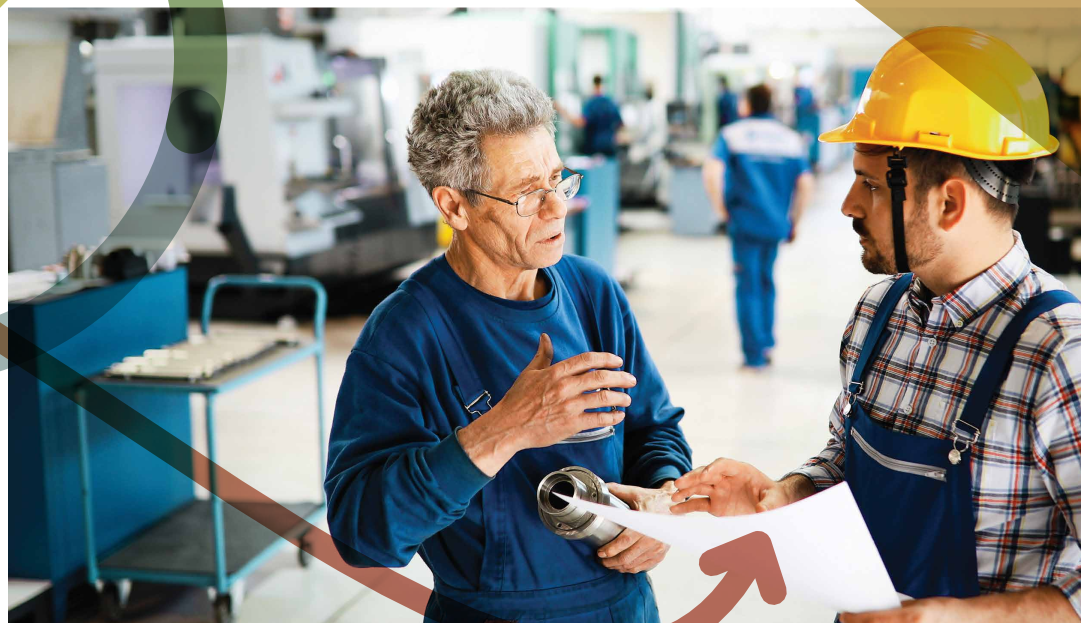


3 STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING HOURLY WORKERS

BY ROB SEAY





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It's time to stop taking hourly employees for granted. Despite the fact that hourly employees make up nearly 60% of the U.S. workforce, leaders tend to discount them when formulating employee engagement strategies.[1] Together, the high turnover in hourly positions and the idea that hourly workers are a renewable (and replaceable) resource lead to management styles that outright ignore the needs of this group. Leaders instead focus their engagement efforts on salaried employees and often perceive that group as more "valuable" because of the greater time, effort, and costs associated with staffing those roles.

But hourly employees make up the very foundation of the modern organization. In an industrial environment, they produce and handle the business's products. In an administrative setting, they make sure that the organization runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. In customer-facing positions, they represent the business and are the first (and last) thing customers associate with their experiences with the company as a whole.

For these reasons, hourly workers, too, deserve to be on the receiving end of employee engagement strategies. They are the seldom-acknowledged core of every organization: their work keeps the company running. With that in mind, management needs to develop and implement better strategies for engaging this group of workers.

MAKE WORK MEANINGFUL

Although Millennials have a reputation as the group that most prioritizes having a sense of purpose in their work, workers of all generations want their workplace contributions to be meaningful.[2] But how can organizations cultivate that sense of purpose?

Communication is key. Clear and explicit communication can bring employees (both hourly and salaried) on board with the organizational mission. Companies need to connect the dots for all employees between what hourly workers do on a day-to-day basis and how that contributes to the organization and to the world at large.

Sometimes that purpose is less tied to the organization than leaders would like, but that doesn't mean it's impossible to make a good connection with workers anyway. One Gallup study on factory workers found that this population didn't care much for organizational mission but was motivated by the opportunity to give back to communities.[3] Factories with a "local" mission saw employees exhibit greater engagement and ownership over their work. One step toward giving hourly workers meaning and purpose in their work is to ask them what they care about.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Employees' relationships with their colleagues play an immense role in shaping workplace engagement. (For example, people who have a best friend at work are more likely to feel positively about their performance, the recognition they receive, and the meaning of what they do and therefore feel more engaged there.[4]) But the employee–manager relationship is especially critical: as the old saying goes, "People leave managers, not companies." When dealing with a population whose members could leave for even a slight wage increase elsewhere, managers (and management styles) can make or break the work experience for hourly workers.

Managers can reinforce this relationship just making themselves available—by proving that they value their employees by being around when it matters the most. I once worked for an organization with a factory that ran around the clock, and at least once a month I came in for the third shift to walk around the floor and let employees know that I was available if they needed me. Demonstrating support in such fundamental ways and showing care for employees can do more to strengthen the manager–employee relationship (and the employee–company relationship) than an e-mail or a generic newsletter ever could.

GIVE THEM A SEAT AT THE TABLE

When strategizing and managing organizational change, leaders usually turn first to the salaried employees. But the hourly workers are the executors of the organization's function and goals. They are the employees who know the business better than anyone else because they're the ones getting things done every day.

High-level strategic decisions often have the biggest impact on hourly workers, and this population is likely to have firsthand knowledge of how to improve day-to-day operations and processes. If an organization claims to value knowledge but excludes this population from the problem-solving process, it's deliberately neglecting to tap a rich vein of knowledge. Get them involved in the solution, too.

Don't just pull hourly workers aside for focus groups, take what they know, and use that knowledge to craft (and implement) solutions without any further involvement from them. Give these employees the latitude to introduce on the ground level the changes they helped bring about. Employees learn the most through on-the-job experience and social sharing—which means that training protocols, employee manuals, and other formal education programs simply aren't as effective as informal channels. Letting hourly employees become champions of change increases the likelihood that the change will be meaningful and lasting.

When an organization claims to value employees but puts effort into engaging only its salaried workers, it's ignoring a significant—and vital—part of its population. Only by recognizing the value of hourly workers, too, can a company achieve the breadth of employee engagement that will help it to succeed. ■

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Why Reward Employees?

BY CHUCK CSIZMAR

At first glance, the title of this piece is a question that doesn't seem worth asking. After all, isn't the answer obvious? Doesn't *every* organization reward its employees for their work?

But a reward actually includes more than just the salary paid to someone for doing his or her job. Unfortunately, that overly narrow view of reward dominates many managers' thinking about employer–employee relationships. Companies that cannot expand their understanding of reward to encompass more than just a base salary are setting themselves up for a host of problems, both short-term and long-term. They need to understand the implications that certain restrictions on wages can have for a company's overall health.

When reevaluating the role of a reward, organizations need to consider the following points:

- **Wages and competitiveness are linked.** Although this point is seldom argued, an organization's specific comparative marketplace is a moving target. A salary that looks competitive today won't be so tomorrow. So unless a company has a process for updating its pay rates, any competitive edge it gets based on wages will start to slip—and at an ever-increasing rate.
- ***All* costs rise over time.** Too often, companies focus on their rising business costs and forget to consider that living costs, too, keep going up. When an organization freezes its pay levels, its employees will have an increasingly difficult time making ends meet and may seek higher wages elsewhere.
- **"Behavior rewarded is behavior repeated**." This old saying is worth repeating until everyone "gets" it. Companies that reward desired behavior (good performance) are likely to get more of it. Conversely, the lack of reward tends to encourage behavior that's only average—or worse.
- **Companies that want a high-performance culture must pay for it.** Employees who don't receive equitable and competitive pay that's linked to their job performance will turn in average performances. Self-motivation will sustain them only so long, and personal enthusiasm will eventually wane unless it's bolstered by external (monetary) rewards.
- **Employees want their expectations met.** Yes, employees expect to be paid a reasonable base salary for their work. But they also expect to be both acknowledged and rewarded (through pay increases) for making a continuous effort on the company's behalf. No one will work well for very long with his or her pay frozen or without a guarantee of more money. ("Maybe" or "We'll see" won't cut it.)
- **Wages are a fundamental cost of doing business.** Anyone who wants to operate a business must be prepared to incur certain costs; otherwise, he or she shouldn't bother trying to run a company. One of the most important costs is appropriate pay for the people who do the work that keeps the business going.
- **Commitments should be honored.** Any organization that proudly claims to be a "pay-for-performance" company or believes that its employees drive business success had better walk the talk. When employee trust is at stake, the company's unwillingness or inability to fulfill its promises will ensure business mediocrity and possibly even a slow descent into failure.
- **Disgruntled employees can cause a great deal of harm.** When employees start to say "Why bother?" the organization is in trouble. Dissatisfaction with management is both negative and infectious. When morale drops, productively slides as disengagement builds a low-performing culture. And when the breakroom talk focuses on opportunities elsewhere, turnover increases—especially among better performers who are in high demand in the marketplace.

Employees are important to the success of *any* organization. A company is asking for trouble when it treats its employees as an easily replaceable commodity, considers pay as a cost that should be reduced (rather than as an investment in its future), and thinks of its employees not as people but as cells within a spreadsheet or blocks on an organization chart. The old saying "You reap what you sow" rings especially true here: a company that fails to implement a proper pay-for-performance program that regularly recognizes and rewards job performance is sowing the seeds of its own demise. ■

Chuck Csizmar is the founder and principal of CMC Compensation Group, an independent global consulting firm that helps companies manage the effective and efficient utilization of financial rewards for their employees. He can be reached at ccsizmar@cmccompensationgroup.com.

They may forget what you said—
BUT THEY WILL
NEVER FORGET
how you made them FEEL.

—CARL BUEHNER

Building Relationships with Unsuccessful Candidates

BY ELIZABETH SILAS-HAVAS

In many companies (especially those that are desirable workplaces), very few of the candidates who apply for jobs actually get interviews. So what happens to those who don't? Unfortunately, the transition to Internet-based job-seeking has made the candidate experience even more impersonal, often to the point that it leaves candidates feeling overlooked or completely ignored. In fact, in one CareerBuilder study, 45% of job seekers reported that lack of response from employers was what bothered them most about the job-seeking process.[1]

Today, any organization that wants to enhance its employer brand and streamline the recruiting process should focus on providing a good candidate experience to *all* job seekers who come its way. To accomplish this, a company needs to implement practices to make job seekers who take the time to apply feel that the firm has given them sufficient attention, even when they don't get the job (and perhaps not even an interview).

It's important to consider the experiences of unsuccessful candidates for several reasons:

- They may become successful candidates at the same company in the future.
- After a poor candidate experience at a particular firm, they may tell other candidates (via Glassdoor, industry-specific message boards, other online outlets, or in-person conversations, for example) not to apply there.
- A poor candidate experience may make them less likely to become clients of that company or to refer other potential customers there.

People now expect employers to treat candidates as they treat consumers. In particular, this means being responsive to candidates and not ignoring them. As Gerry Crispin, founding member of the Talent Board and expert on candidate experience, put it, "There's absolutely no excuse for not telling someone they didn't get the job or thanking them for applying. You've got to be able to do that—and, at the very least, technology makes it easy to automate this."[2]

But a stiffly worded form letter that concludes with "Do not respond to this e-mail," for example, may not leave candidates with a good impression that can help an organization build its talent network. On a whole, the recruiting space is not doing enough to improve the candidate experience for unsuccessful candidates. Acknowledging and building relationships with some of them, though, can help companies turn unsuccessful (and even unqualified) candidates into assets.

FIVE EASY WAYS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH UNSUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES

- At the very least, use recruiting automation software to thank everyone for applying. When possible, let them know a general timeframe for the hiring decision; this is one way to set expectations that are easily met, thus improving candidates' ratings of their experiences. Go one step further and provide closure by automating the process of letting them know that they haven't been chosen.

- Modulate the tone and wording of automated responses to match both the employer brand and candidate personas. (Based on interviews with both new hires and unsuccessful candidates, candidate personas are composite sketches of each of the candidate "types.") These give everyone involved in recruiting for the organization a sense of who their target audiences are when crafting automated responses (and when creating other new communications and processes).
- Ask candidates who have been eliminated to join the company's talent network, database, opt-in newsletter list, or whatever vehicle the organization can use to stay engaged with unsuccessful candidates and update them on openings for which they are better qualified (and at the same time stay on job seekers' radars as their qualifications improve).
- Tell the company's recruiters to connect personally with candidates on LinkedIn, where they can grow and maintain their talent networks by engaging their connections periodically (for example, through quick e-mail notes) and by inviting them to consider other opportunities.
- Give actual feedback whenever possible, especially to unsuccessful candidates who not only applied but also took the time to interview. Leave them on a good note by giving positive feedback and mentioning that they just weren't the right fit. Even when volume makes it impossible to offer detailed, individualized feedback, a formulaic response can still stay positive and emphasize the difficulty of the decision process.

ONE MORE SUGGESTION

The only thing more important than giving feedback is receiving it. Offer candidates channels through which to offer direct feedback (before they take their criticisms and insights elsewhere). Gerry Crispin suggests that companies use these strategies to "listen" to their candidates:

- Chat with candidates via Twitter or pop-up windows on the company website
- Respond to direct communication from candidates on social media
- Give candidates direct e-mail addresses for the people overseeing their application process
- Make it possible for candidates to reply to automated e-mail[3]

Pay attention to what job seekers say. Their feedback may shed light on aspects of the recruitment and hiring process that need improvement.

CULTIVATE RELATIONSHIPS WITH ALL CANDIDATES

The more relationships a company has with individuals, the more applications it will receive for open positions. With significant numbers of currently employed people looking for or interested in new jobs (one study puts 71% of workers in that boat[4]), organizations that cultivate relationships increase their chances of finding excellent candidates. Building strong relationships across many networks—both digital and in-person—can help companies improve their long-term recruiting performance, and treating all candidates well now makes it easier to source top-quality workers down the road. ■

Elizabeth Silas-Havas writes articles and books on diverse topics related to communication and transformation. She can be reached at writing@elizabethsilas.com.

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The IMPORTANCE of SOFT SKILLS

BY CATHERINE GONCALVES

Companies that want to hire the best people are increasingly coming to the realization that they need to look for strong soft skills in their candidates. But what are soft skills? Why are they important in the workplace? And how can employers identify and evaluate them?

Sales and training expert Rob Jolles defines soft skills as "communication skills, time management, problem solving, working with teams, selling, negotiating, and basically learning how to work well with other people."[1] In the past, companies have usually prioritized hard skills (skills that can be taught and measured, such as knowledge of a software program). But the days of soft skills being underrated may be coming to an end. With "one in three recruiting professionals [believing that] job candidates' soft skills have gotten worse in the past five years," there's widespread agreement that "parents and colleges need to do a better job of teaching students soft skills before they enter the workforce."[2]

With his famous assertion that "technology alone is not enough," Steve Jobs placed a high value on art, design, and social considerations at Apple. Other tech-oriented companies have been following suit. More and more Silicon Valley organizations are recognizing the importance of cultivating social and cultural skills among their employees.

For example, a few years ago, Google analyzed the HR data from its first fifteen years and found that "among the eight most important qualities of Google's top employees, STEM expertise comes in dead last"—a startling realization for one of the top technology companies in the world. The corollary to this discovery was equally stunning:

> The seven top characteristics of success at Google are all soft skills: being a good coach; communicating and listening well; possessing insights into others (including [others'] different values and points of view); having empathy toward and being supportive of one's colleagues; being a good critical thinker and problem solver; and being able to make connections across complex ideas.[3]

Hard skills are important, but putting too much emphasis on them makes it hard to establish a positive and productive workplace. In light of such findings, it's clearly time for employers to recognize the importance of soft skills when searching for new hires.

It isn't easy to evaluate candidates' soft skills, and because hiring the wrong person can be very costly, many employers are using technological solutions to help them make smarter hiring decisions. Video screening (as a recorded video cover letter or as a live interview) and pre-employment screening tests are a few useful tools. Some employers also require candidates to participate in job simulations that shed light on how they would perform on the job.

As the business world shines an ever-brighter spotlight on soft skills, hiring managers and HR staff must develop new—and more effective—ways to identify and analyze them. Although tech skills have dominated much of the hiring conversation for several years, the abilities to communicate, negotiate, and work well with others will never go out of style. ■

Catherine Goncalves is an RFP writer for iCIMS Inc., a leading provider of innovative Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) talent-acquisition solutions that help businesses win the war for top talent. To learn more about how iCIMS can help your organization, visit www.icims.com.

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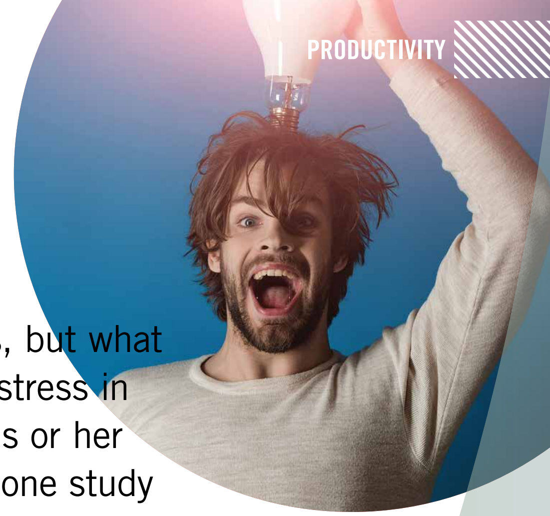

How to BOOST *PRODUCTIVITY*

BY NICHOLE KELTGEN

Professional life and personal life are two separate domains, but what happens in one can strongly affect the other. For example, stress in someone's personal life can have a negative influence on his or her work life. This is especially true for financial-related stress: one study found that "employees who are stressed about their finances are nearly five times more likely to be distracted by their finances at work, twice as likely to spend three hours or more at work dealing with financial matters, and three times more likely to spend five hours or more."[1]

Because debt is one of the major stressors in people's lives today, many organizations are recognizing the impact of personal debt on their employees' professional lives—and, in turn, the companies' bottom lines—and establishing financial wellness programs for their workers. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, more and more employers are offering some type of financial advice or resources to their employees. In 2016, for example, "24% of organizations offered employees online financial/investment advice, 27% offered one-on-one advice, [and] 22% offered group or classroom financial advice."[2]

Increasingly, today's employees *want* these opportunities. In one recent survey about employee benefits, 40% of respondents said they were "looking to their employer[s] for financial security."[3] The key, then, is for organizations to develop and implement effective programs that meet their employees' needs.

Aside from wages, employers have historically most influenced their employees' finances through retirement plan benefits and occasionally through employee assistance programs (which are often underutilized). This approach has not been very effective, though, especially for individuals carrying a great deal of debt. Retirement is not even a consideration for many of them, given their current circumstances.

Companies that want to help their employees improve their finances need to start by recognizing that, just as individuals can find it challenging to make changes to their physical and emotional well-being, they can also find daunting the prospect of taking action to address their financial well-being. Medical professionals have found that education alone on health issues and "shoulds" do not result in changes to behavior. After all, most people already know that they "should" exercise more or eat healthier but still don't do it. The same is true for financial wellness: most people know that they "should" pay off their debts and save for retirement but find that accomplishing those tasks is easier said than done.

As with health-related wellness, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to financial wellness. People have different financial priorities at different stages of their lives, for example. Generational differences, too, can shape people's financial needs and expectations.[4] Employees are at different places on the financial wellness spectrum and have varying preferences for accessing services they may need.

To be effective, a financial wellness program should include both education and tools. The educational component should cover the various aspects of an employee's financial life, such as debt management, college education funding, mortgages, credit management, retirement planning, and budgeting (to name just a few). The tools should encourage and enable people to take action based on what they've learned. These resources can include financial wellness assessments (similar to health risk assessments) that outline the bigger picture of an individual's financial situation, as well as access to financial consultants or financial planners.

A successful financial wellness program may not only help boost productivity but can also help recruit and retain top talent. Educating employees about their personal financial health can help them increase their participation in retirement plans and make more confident investment decisions while they build strong financial futures with the company. As they experience less stress about their finances, they are able to focus more on work and improve both their own productivity and the overall well-being of the organization. ■

Nichole Keltgen is a health management consultant at Associated Benefits and Risk Consulting, with expertise in the strategic development, implementation, and integration of wellness programs. She can be reached at Nichole.Keltgen@associatedbrc.com.

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IMPROVE SAFETY by Promoting a Just Culture

BY MARK STEINHOFER

Most people think of a safety program as a series of plans and actions designed to protect workers. Though that definition contains valid elements, it is incomplete. A truly effective safety program also includes a philosophy that regards the workplace as more than the sum of its individual elements.

One of the most important aspects of that philosophy is its approach to human behavior. When an accident occurs in your workplace, which response is the worker at the heart of the incident more likely to hear?

- "You are highly trained. If you followed your training, you would not make mistakes. So you weren't careful enough—and therefore you should be punished."
- "You are human, and humans make mistakes. Let's explore why the system allowed (or failed to accommodate) your mistake. And then let's improve the system."

The first response is a person-centered approach based on the "bad-apple theory," the idea that people are the dominant contributors to accidents. But the second response, a system-centered approach that recognizes the realities of human behavior, is far more valid and useful. It holds that humans are fallible and views errors as inevitable consequences of flaws in the system, rather than as exclusively human-caused events.

Under a philosophy that holds the system (rather than the people who operate within that system) at fault, the best approach is an open culture in which employees can communicate openly with supervisors and management about safety issues. Instead of using safety personnel as "cops" who punish wrongdoing, the contractor and all employees become accountable for safe behavior.

The environment that most effectively promotes safety is what's known as a "just culture." Here, the word *just* describes actions based on what is morally right and fair (as in "fighting for a just cause"). In a just culture, people are encouraged (and even rewarded) for providing essential safety-related information; at the same time, there is also a clear line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Within a just culture, an honest mistake is resolved by remedial action taken through the established safety-management system.

A just culture also promotes an attitude of questioning, resists complacency, is committed to excellence, and fosters both personal accountability and corporate self-regulation in safety matters. It sees human error as inevitable and system monitoring and improvement as crucial tools for addressing those errors. And it holds that individuals who knowingly violate safety procedures or policies must be accountable for their actions.

When an incident occurs, an effective way to determine accountability in a just culture is to ask these four questions:

- Did the employee intend to cause harm?
- Did the employee come to work under the influence of alcohol or drugs (or was he or she similarly impaired by another means)?

- Did the employee knowingly and unreasonably increase risk?
- Would another similarly trained and skilled employee in the same situation have acted in a similar manner?

If the answer to the first three questions is "no" and the answer to the last question is "yes," then accountability lies not with the employee but with the system.

Another key aspect of a just culture is the presence of specific, fair, and nonarbitrary methods of determining whether the individual or the system should be held accountable. When analyzing the behavior of an individual employee, use the familiar framework of a traffic signal to measure accountability:

- A "red light" involves reckless, high-culpability behavior—meaning that there was a conscious disregard of a substantial and unjustifiable risk.
- A "yellow light" suggests negligence and at-risk behavior but recognizes that although an intentional action increased the risk of an accident, the individual did not recognize the risk. (Negligence results in a harmful consequence that a reasonable and prudent person would have foreseen.)
- Finally, a "green light" indicates true human error, in which an individual acted in a manner that inadvertently may or may not have caused an undesirable outcome.

A just culture doesn't exist simply because someone *says* it does. It cannot exist at an organization until several prerequisites are in place: ease of reporting, trust, independence, motivation and promotion, feedback, and acknowledgement. It also doesn't eliminate the usual knee-jerk reactions that arise when failures occur (and they will):

- hindsight bias: looking back at the event as though one already had full knowledge of the outcome
- proximal focus: concentrating on the people immediately involved in the event and not giving enough attention to other "distant" factors
- counterfactual responses: "If only X" suggestions, which reveal nothing about the cause and indicate only what the people did
- judgmental responses: taking attitudes (such as "the employee must have been an idiot") that are purely subjective and shed no light on the actual cause

What happens when an organization achieves a just culture? For starters, it's likely to see increased reporting, because employees will be less afraid to share concerns when they aren't worried about getting in trouble for what they report. There will be greater trust among teams, and safety policies and procedures will be more effective. Often, the primary reason for establishing a just culture focuses on safety concerns. But the factors that lead to accidents are often the same ones that result in production losses, quality-related issues, and cost problems. Taking the time to reevaluate the approach to one area—safety—can have significant positive effects throughout the organization. ■

Mark Steinhofer is the manager of special services for Safety Management Group. He has also consulted as an expert witness in several court cases and currently teaches an undergraduate course in construction safety and the OSHA standards at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. He can be reached at MarkSteinhofer@SafetyManagementGroup.com.

The Best Way to Improve as a Manager

BY LORENA MARTINEZ

Managers often say that they want to become better leaders. That's a good goal to have, because the working environment is shaped to a large degree by the interactions managers have with their teams and with each other. For that reason one of the best ways to be a good leader is to positively shape employees' opinions about their companies and the work they do.

Employees who have positive sentiments about their organizations are more driven to put in extra effort and find creative ways to do more with less; conversely, those with negative sentiments lack the motivation to put in anything but the minimum effort required to get paid. A study of the relationships among specific leadership behaviors and the sentiments they create in employees found that one of the manager behaviors that most often results in a positive employee sentiment is involving people in important decisions that affect them.[1]

This doesn't mean that leaders need to approach *everyone* in the organization for his or her input on strategic decisions (though some companies *are* doing this!). It does, however, mean that managers need to understand that how they respond to their employees' suggestions and ideas can strongly influence those employees' feelings and experiences. The "old school" style of management holds that the boss should know everything. But research and experience have demonstrated that the most effective leaders acknowledge that they actually *don't* know everything and trust their teams to be the experts in their jobs.

Managers who want to improve in this fundamental area should start with a simple reflection:

> How often do my people surprise me by delivering work that goes above and beyond what I have asked of them? And how often do they deliver *just* what I asked for (or even something that is insufficient)?

The answers to those questions reveal what the manager experiences most often from his or her team, which in turn serves as a good indication of how the team members experience the manager's responses to their suggestions and ideas.

Certainly, individual levels of performance and internal motivation *do* matter. However, a leader's ability to include employee ideas consistently and effectively can further unleash employees' potential and motivation, and can also drive tremendous improvement in team morale. By building a team's confidence in its ability to solve challenges and reduce its dependence on managers when facing situations beyond repeatable processes, this behavior can also take managers out of daily operational issues, thus freeing them to do strategic thinking, planning, and innovation.

The single best action someone can take to be a better manager is to seek and respond positively to his or her employees' ideas and suggestions. This behavior has a much greater and more sustained impact than bringing cupcakes to the office for everyone or even paying bonuses. Unfortunately, most managers who want to improve their leadership limit their actions only to giving those types of rewards, which may be appreciated but do not necessarily move the needle much on leadership scores. Employee empowerment is the best way to build the sense of accomplishment and pride among employees that can help create a great working environment. ■

Lorena Martinez is a New York–based consultant at Great Place to Work (www.greatplacetowork.com), the global authority on high-trust, high-performance workplace cultures.

1. This research (a collaboration among Great Place to Work, Harvard, Duke, and MIT) is ongoing and has not yet been published.

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