

THE RESOURCE

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Labor & Industrial **INSIGHTS** Magazine

Adapting Lean Manufacturing

for Seasonal Production

INSIDE

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Corporate Culture Is Important

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Satisfaction

As we celebrate the 40th Anniversary of our Company in 2019, I feel compelled to reflect back on the incredible journey that brings us to this milestone. - Kathy Hartung

In the last issue, I shared that an employee had asked if I would be willing to mentor her and give insight into running a company, etc. I hope you enjoyed the '3 Fs' that have made it work for me!

One of the questions she asked me in her initial request was, "what do I wish I had known at 29 that I know today"? Interestingly, the answer to that question was readily available to me. It is certainly that I wish I had known my CORE (CORE Assessment)...how I'm hardwired, why I operate the way I do, what that means, and how I can be my best self. I knew at 29 that I thought & responded differently than most people, and that I could always see a positive opportunity in every situation. It wasn't until I discovered a tool (the CORE) that really explained me, and the differences in everyone, that I began to understand the *WHY*. Why we think, respond, operate, enjoy, get motivated, get stressed, love doing, hate doing, put off, or do first, love interacting with people, hate interacting with people, talk & listen to ideas, or see that as a major waste of time....and on and on and on.

I wish that at 29 I would've had this understanding of those around me. Instead of expecting everyone to act, work and think like I did, to really know how they were wired, and lead them into roles where they would thrive and succeed.

I wish I had known my parents' CORE results. To understand how we were similar and different from each other. I always knew my Mother and I saw things from a totally different perspective, but I didn't know why, nor did I have a way to understand her or our differences.

I wish I had known my children's CORE results, so that I could have parented them using that knowledge, and honoring who they were, rather than expecting them to operate like me!

I ask myself what difference would the power of this knowledge & understanding have really made if I had it 29 years ago, to use and apply to my life?

I would've been a more effective *Leader*!

I would've been a more kind, loving and understanding *Daughter*!

I would've been a more effective, kind, loving and understanding *Mother*!

Our true opportunity with this knowledge and understanding is in our desire to be our best self, to lift others to be their best self, and to honor each other in our differences!

THE RESOURCE

“Are you operating as your BEST SELF? How can we help you be your BEST SELF? Call me. In 10 minutes after taking the CORE, I can begin to help you understand how...”



Best Regards,

Kathy Hartung, CEO

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Adapting Lean Manufacturing for Seasonal Production

BY RELIABLE PLANT

The goals of lean manufacturing are simple: to eliminate waste and to keep what adds value. In any area of manufacturing, waste is defined as resources (such as materials, labor, or time) that are used without yielding something of marketable value. For example, if an employee uses a tool a hundred times a day, waste exists if she must retrieve it from the other side of the factory (and return it afterward) each time she needs to use it; to eliminate that wasted labor, the tool should be located closer to where the work is being performed. Waste also exists if one employee is overworked and burning out while another is always looking for ways to fill his time; to eliminate that wasted labor, the workload should be balanced throughout the workforce.

Now in widespread use, lean manufacturing provides value across markets for a variety of very different companies. However, standard lean thinking alone cannot address the specific pressures of manufacturing in a highly seasonal industry.

CASE STUDY: ALENE CANDLES

As New Hampshire-based Alene Candles has grown from an entrepreneurial small business into the largest contract producer in the American candle market, it has retooled its manufacturing processes to meet increasing production demands. Now the company is applying concepts from lean manufacturing to tighten up its processes to match customer needs, maximize profit, and maintain a reliable workforce.

Over the past two years, Alene has completely redesigned its overall manufacturing process, which was originally created for high-volume orders. Many Alene customers were buying small-batch boutique products, however, and a review revealed that changeovers for these smaller orders were a major source of waste. “We looked at the way we were manufacturing and decided that our process start to end wasn’t supportive for that small customer,” says Jeffrey Armstrong, Alene Candles’ chief operating officer.

So the company started with a fresh sheet of paper, revamped its processes, and revised the layout of the factory and the design and function of the work centers. These changes allowed Alene to balance labor more appropriately and increase its output while simultaneously using less labor and alleviating stress on employees.

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Some of the lean manufacturing strategies Alene uses include value stream mapping, whereby a business charts out a process from start to finish to identify time and cost hangups; a kaizen event, in which a small group of employees applies simple analysis tools to eliminate waste in a process they know well; and employee training, in which each participant can identify and eliminate waste in his or her corner of the business. No matter how useful a strategy is, though, it’s important not to become distracted by a theory when running a business. Like any system, lean manufacturing is designed to address particular issues, and like any idea, it emerged from a particular place and time.

What is now known as lean manufacturing was called “just in time” manufacturing when it was first developed in postwar Japan. At that time, its central aims were thriftiness and the “just in time” (and not too early) acquisition of inventory. Of course, the business environment of early Toyota was different from the one that Alene Candles now inhabits generations later, and Alene has bent lean manufacturing to meet its own specific demands and opportunities. For example, although unemployment was high in

postwar Japan, today Alene competes for labor for its plants in New Hampshire and Ohio, which both have low unemployment rates. In addition, although car production can continue year round, the candle market is highly seasonal, and Alene produces the vast majority of its candles during a six-month window, with production at its peak during September and October.

STAFFING CONCERNS

In seasonal manufacturing, the most important element of success is appropriate staffing: companies need the right number of people with the right kind of training. A simple application—or misapplication—of lean manufacturing principles might suggest drastically slicing both the number of workers and the overall payroll in off months. Certainly, the argument could be made that keeping highly qualified workers in the factory when there is less work demanding less skill is a clear example of waste. However, leaders must see the entire model as a cohesive package. Although cutting staff to a bare minimum might scrape extra profit out of January and February, responsible business practice considers a longer time horizon.

At Alene, staff can triple or quadruple between low- and high-production months. Lean manufacturing offers numerous benefits in such periods of transition. Most importantly, it can create the type of good design that makes a seasonal employee’s job as straightforward and as learnable as possible, which in turn makes that employee more effective.

In a competitive labor market for employers, lean manufacturing also reduces employee dissatisfaction. Because it makes workers’ jobs more efficient, they do not identify “easier” ways while following convoluted work designs. By eliminating the parts of their jobs that don’t matter to the process, it shows them why their work is important to the project. And it saves them from resenting slackers (or becoming slackers themselves) by distributing the workload in ways that make sense.

FLEXIBILITY IS KEY

But how does an organization scale up quickly—and without sacrificing quality—with unfamiliar workers in regions where other jobs are available? The solution requires a reworking of lean thinking.

A flexible workforce is critical in the off season. When operations slow to a trickle, it is essential that the organization keep workers who are adept at a number of functions, because not all specialties may be required at the same time. When the orders flood in, the company’s most

important asset will be highly skilled, reliable labor with expertise that can be shared with seasonal workers to make them more effective in a sprint. The best way to meet these multiple requirements, however, is not always the “leanest” way.


At Alene, a core group of knowledgeable, trusted employees brings newcomers up to speed in the busy times and doubles as the team of flexible workers who manage all functions in the slow times. This means that Alene carries extra staff (and extra wages) in the slow season, but as Armstrong points out, “that is part of the investment for being successful in the busy season.”

Alene’s strategy includes overpaying at times and employing what appear to be wasteful practices. For example, during a slow period, when a machine operator is driving a lift truck or a line lead is boxing candles and Alene compensates them at the rates owed to a machine operator and a line lead, respectively, on that day the company’s compensation scheme seems to include waste. Those two employees’ skills are not being utilized in “just in time” practice. This investment pays off during the busy times, though, when those core employees make up the foundation of the workforce. In this “big picture” perspective, what looks like waste at first glance isn’t actually waste at all.

In fact, Alene continues to invest more in this particular type of “waste.” Plans are already in the works to strengthen the tutorial infrastructure on the factory floor in order to best utilize the company’s human resources. Alene also embraces other good waste through its Conscious Leadership program, which gives employees time to play at work, space to breathe, and opportunities to treat their feelings authentically. Although these allowances might take employees away from their work stations, they foster a more collaborative community, which drives down turnover and burnout.

Alene’s solution to the challenges of seasonal production draws from lean manufacturing principles but adapts them to meet the company’s unique needs. By observing operations first and then developing strategies appropriate for that specific context, Alene has been able to design processes that increase flexibility and ensure a skilled, sustainable workforce.

This article was originally published on the *Reliable Plant* website by Noria Corporation (www.noria.com), who helps companies enable reliability through better lubrication processes.

A stylized illustration of several cyclists in various colored jerseys (red, yellow, blue, grey) riding on a path. The background shows a green field and distant hills under a blue sky. The illustration is done in a painterly, slightly textured style.

Worth the Investment: Why Corporate Culture Is Important

BY JULIE DODD

June 2018 marked 92 consecutive months in which new jobs were created; during that month the unemployment rate hit its lowest point in nearly two decades.¹ These numbers indicate fantastic news for job seekers and the overall economy but also signal an underlying issue for employers: there's a talent shortage, and its negative effects are especially strong during a time when employees are twice as likely to quit than to be laid off.² Against such low unemployment and steadily increasing wages, attracting and retaining high-quality candidates can be extremely challenging. The most effective way for an employer to stand out and build loyalty under these competitive conditions is to foster a high-functioning, people-first corporate culture.

Thoughtful, strategic investment in the lives of employees pays dividends and delivers real business results. Companies that do this attract the best minds in the industry and are rewarded with more loyal, more productive, and happier employees. But developing, maintaining, and improving corporate culture requires a substantial amount of time, care, and financial resources to make a true difference—which is why even the most forward-thinking executives can have difficulty deciding how much to invest in culture.

When leaders fully understand the comprehensive business case for *why* investing in their people is so important, however, the decision is usually much easier to make. A positive and productive culture isn't just great for employees—it's also great for companies. For example, Ultimate Software receives just as much press for its employee-focused culture as it does for its solutions and services. Its reputation as a great workplace has helped it attract great employees, which in turn helped it hit \$1B in recurring sales revenue in 2018.

Clearly, an investment in corporate culture is an investment in the bottom line. Here are a few reasons why organizations should prioritize making those investments more effectively.

BETTER HIRES, STRONGER OUTPUT, ENHANCED RETENTION

The inherent benefits of enhanced corporate culture include improved employee morale and engagement, and numerous studies suggest that engagement positively influences productivity, performance, and retention. For example, "organizations with a high level of engagement do report 22% higher productivity."³ Similarly, a global study of 50,000 employees found that the ones who "are most committed perform 20 percent better and are 87 percent less likely to leave the organization."⁴ Considering the high cost of replacing even



Image from iampixal.com / Library of Congress (Source)

a single valuable employee (up to twice his or her annual salary), it's imperative that organizations do everything they can to encourage their employees to perform their best *and* stick around.⁵

MORE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The direct correlation between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction has been well documented in numerous studies. For example, one found that employee engagement has an even greater effect on customer satisfaction than sleep medications has on insomnia.⁶ When employees feel supported and empowered by their organizations, they're motivated to do their best to give their customers that same level of care.

INCREASED SALES AND BETTER SHAREHOLDER RETURNS

Improved corporate culture is also directly tied to increased profits. One analysis of 28 years' worth of stock-market statistics found that organizations that invested in employee satisfaction "generated 2.3 percent to 3.8 percent higher stock returns per year than their peers."⁷ Research by Glassdoor revealed that "increasing employee engagement investments by 10 percent can increase profits by \$2,400 per employee, per year."⁸ Additionally, a three-year-long study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* tracked 755 retail-bank employees for three years and learned that employees' attitudes and corporate culture had a significant impact on overall business outcomes.⁹

The strongest corporate cultures are built around the idea that when companies take care of their employees, the employees will take care of the organization's customers, who will, in turn, take care of the

shareholders. Organizations that invest in their corporate culture are simultaneously investing in their future. Company policies and practices that put people first will yield payoff for years and years to come. ■

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FIND THE BEST TALENT: 3 Recruitment & Selection Strategies

BY SHARLYN LAUBY

Discussions about recruitment usually focus on the things that recruiters and talent acquisition professionals need to do in order to hire the best talent. Unfortunately, hiring managers are often overlooked in these conversations. But they, too, should play an active role in the hiring process. After all, the new employees will be working on their teams—and selecting the wrong person can be costly.

Making bad hires is a common mistake. In fact, 74 percent of the employers who participated in one study about bad hires indicated that “they [had] hired the wrong person for a position”—at an average loss of \$14,900 for each one. Both of the top two reasons for why a hire turned out bad involved skills: a candidate mistakenly believed that he or she could learn missing skills quickly, or a candidate wasn’t honest about his or her skills.¹ Although performance coaching and upskilling can be effective ways to build new employee capabilities, it’s important that the hiring manager and the candidate put those plans in place proactively, as opposed to finding out about them only after the offer has been made.

To avoid expensive recruiting mistakes, hiring managers need to be able to determine which candidate will be the right fit for a particular role. But accomplishing this isn’t as easy as it looks: the interview process seems simple on the surface, but recruiting is actually quite complicated. Hiring managers who use the following three strategies can leverage the hiring process effectively to get the best outcomes for their teams.

1. DEFINE THE ROLE AND PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

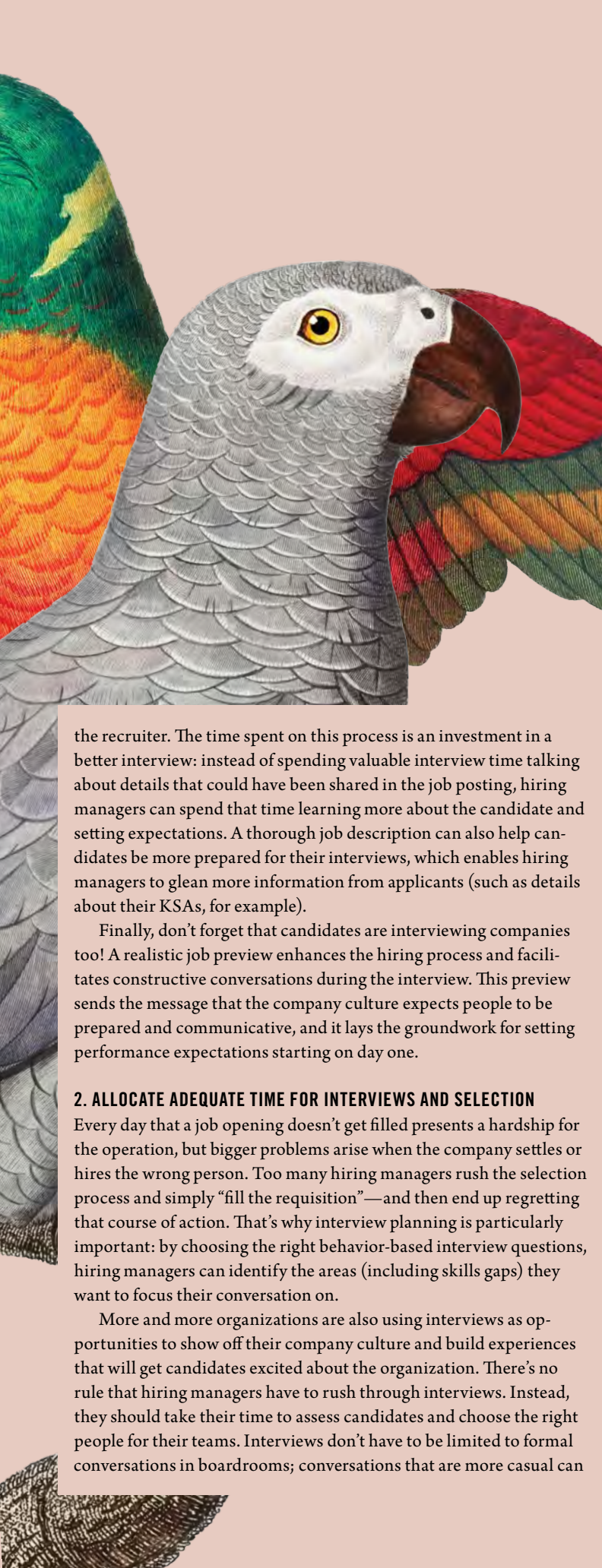
No one likes to update job descriptions. But making a good hire isn’t possible without a clear and concise description that illustrates *exactly* what the open position requires. The hiring manager can help ensure that the posting includes the following details about job:

- Required knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)
- Required previous work experience
- Formal educational requirements
- Other information about the position (hours, responsibilities, etc.)
- Information about how to apply for the position

When these details are made clear in the job posting, the candidates who are being screened and interviewed will know what the requirements are—and whether they meet them (or fall short). The better the job posting, the more likely it is that the organization will interview only suitably qualified applicants, because most unqualified candidates will simply opt out of applying.

An ideal time for a hiring manager to review the job description and make any updates is during the recruiting strategy meeting with





help candidates relax and open up more (and might be more enjoyable for hiring managers too!).

Once the interviews are completed, it's equally important that hiring managers dedicate enough time to the selection process as well. By properly evaluating candidates through the use of assessments, background screenings, reference checks, etc., organizations have a better chance of making the best decisions—and avoiding the worst hiring mistakes.

3. CHECK FOR CULTURAL FIT

In one recent study, 87% of the business leaders surveyed “made successful hires when evaluating cultural fit—congruent values, beliefs, and outlook between the candidate and company—as well as [the candidate’s] potential.”² “Cultural fit” isn’t the same as “similar-to-me bias.” Rather, it’s a measure of how well someone will be able to work successfully in the organization and get along with his or her coworkers. To get a sense of cultural fit, hiring managers should spend time during interviews learning about candidates’ soft skills in areas such as communication, problem solving, and critical thinking.

Another way to measure cultural fit is to have teams meet candidates during the interview process, either as part of a formal conversation or as part of a more casual interaction without the hiring manager present (either way, though, hiring managers should give teams advance guidance on the things they can legally ask about). Through this version of collaborative hiring, teams are more likely to have buy in for a selected candidate, which in turn makes them more likely to help him or her succeed as a new colleague. Collaborative hiring jumpstarts the relationship-building process for new hires, because it means that on their first day on the job, they already know more people beyond their recruiters and hiring managers and have more people who they can reach out to with questions (especially those they might be reluctant to ask their bosses or HR).

BETTER MANAGERS CAN HIRE BETTER TALENT

There’s some truth in the old saying “People don’t leave jobs, they leave managers.” In addition to bringing in a new employee, the hiring process is also an opportunity for an organization to show candidates that it has a good management and leadership team. If a candidate interviews with a manager who is disorganized, rushed, and not a great communicator, the chances are good that candidate won’t take the job. He or she will think that’s what the manager is like all the time—and no one wants to work for a manager like that.

Hiring managers are looking for team members who can deliver results. Candidates want to know that they’re going to work for an organization with a terrific culture and a manager who has the leadership skills to support them. The interview is where everyone gets to show how good he or she is.

Sharlyn Lauby is the author of *HR Bartender* (www.hrbartender.com), a friendly place to discuss workplace issues. This article was sponsored by James Cook University (www.jcu.edu.au), a world-class university ranking in the top 2 percent in the Academic Ranking of World Universities. They can be reached on Twitter at @HRBartender and @jcu.

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the recruiter. The time spent on this process is an investment in a better interview: instead of spending valuable interview time talking about details that could have been shared in the job posting, hiring managers can spend that time learning more about the candidate and setting expectations. A thorough job description can also help candidates be more prepared for their interviews, which enables hiring managers to glean more information from applicants (such as details about their KSAs, for example).

Finally, don’t forget that candidates are interviewing companies too! A realistic job preview enhances the hiring process and facilitates constructive conversations during the interview. This preview sends the message that the company culture expects people to be prepared and communicative, and it lays the groundwork for setting performance expectations starting on day one.

2. ALLOCATE ADEQUATE TIME FOR INTERVIEWS AND SELECTION

Every day that a job opening doesn’t get filled presents a hardship for the operation, but bigger problems arise when the company settles or hires the wrong person. Too many hiring managers rush the selection process and simply “fill the requisition”—and then end up regretting that course of action. That’s why interview planning is particularly important: by choosing the right behavior-based interview questions, hiring managers can identify the areas (including skills gaps) they want to focus their conversation on.

More and more organizations are also using interviews as opportunities to show off their company culture and build experiences that will get candidates excited about the organization. There’s no rule that hiring managers have to rush through interviews. Instead, they should take their time to assess candidates and choose the right people for their teams. Interviews don’t have to be limited to formal conversations in boardrooms; conversations that are more casual can

HOW TO Improve Employee Satisfaction

BY STIJN DE GROEF

Keeping a finger on the pulse of employee satisfaction can help an organization see whether it's staying true to its purpose, when it needs to hire new talent, and when to get rid of some bad apples. Just as checking someone's blood pressure can shed light on his or her overall health, checking a company's employee satisfaction levels can reveal valuable information about its overall health. The doctor is in—and here's a prescription for measuring employee satisfaction, interpreting the results, and, most importantly, making changes when they're needed.

SURVEYS

Anonymous surveys are probably the most popular tools for assessing employee satisfaction at all levels—and research shows that they really work.¹ When surveys are anonymous, people can be surprisingly open and share things that they would otherwise be too hesitant to reveal. Online surveys can be inexpensive and simple to implement—characteristics that appeal to all the budget-conscious and DIY-loving companies out there. Organizations that have larger budgets or want outside help can purchase one of the many off-the-shelf survey programs or partner with companies that specialize in providing survey services.

At least once per year, a company should conduct an employee satisfaction survey that features a mix of multiple-choice, rating, and free-form–response questions. Here are a few good ones to include:

- Do you feel connected to your coworkers?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how happy are you at work?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with your work–life balance?
- What makes you feel recognized at work?
- In your role, do you feel connected to the company purpose?
- If you were to leave this company tomorrow, what would be your main reason for doing so?

To get the most out of surveys, companies should start using them sooner than they think they need to—even as early as during new hire onboarding. A nonanonymous survey of new hires during their first week provides an engagement baseline that can be used to compare incoming employees with current employees and could yield answers to questions such as “Are team members becoming more or less engaged as time goes on?” and “Are middle managers more or less satisfied than C-suite employees?”

DATA ANALYSIS

Once the survey data is gathered, it’s time to figure out how to put it to work:

- Look for trends within different parts of the company: the entire organization, smaller groups (such as the marketing department or the sales department), or even smaller teams within those groups. (Note: For this type of data analysis to be possible, employees will need to specify their teams. To maintain the participants’ anonymity, be sure the survey doesn’t ask for any further identifying information.)
- Compare the data with past survey results to identify trends over time.
- Hone in on connections. (Are poor managers or toxic employees poisoning teams, for example? If certain managers or departments are thriving, can they share their strategies with others?)
- Whenever possible, compare the data against industry benchmarks. If an organization is beating the competition, that information can give it an edge in recruitment.
- Identify key performance indicators and look for correlations between an employee’s satisfaction and whether he or she leaves the company.

Even when employees don’t directly participate in surveys, they are providing valuable information about themselves: in one recent study, for example, Facebook found that “people who don’t fill out either of [its] two annual surveys are 2.6 times more likely to leave in the next six months.”²

MAKING IMPROVEMENTS

Improving employee satisfaction means acting on feedback gained through employee satisfaction surveys—otherwise, what’s the point of gathering that data? If employees consistently rate their work–life balance poorly, consider hosting a “community forum” to gather suggestions for improvement in that area. If team members are engaged during the onboarding stage but become less satisfied as time goes on, look at how their expectations aren’t being met.

The good news is that the mere act of conducting employee surveys can put an organization on the path toward improvement, regardless of the survey results. People often change their behavior when asked about it. For example, in one study simply asking people about their interest in volunteering for the American Cancer Society caused “volunteering rates [to] spike from 4 percent to 31 percent.”³

Sometimes it’s just not possible for a company to make the changes that its employees ask for. But even when employees don’t get all that they want, they’re happy to know that their voices are heard.⁴ And isn’t that the whole point of focusing on employee satisfaction in the first place?

A passionate HR professional, entrepreneur, and cyclist, Stijn De Groef is the CEO of Talmundo (www.talmundo.com), an HR technology company. Before founding Talmundo in 2012, he worked in senior talent management roles at EMEA and at the global level at Swarovski and Goodyear. De Groef now travels the world to spread the word about Talmundo’s employee onboarding software and the strategic importance for businesses to get onboarding right.

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A "COACH APPROACH" TO FEEDBACK

BY JOE HIRSCH

Being on the receiving end of feedback is never easy—especially when it's critical. Criticism can challenge someone's sense of status, elevate stress, and compromise relationships.¹ And that sting isn't felt only by those on the receiving end: many of the managers who have to deliver feedback worry about stirring up workplace drama or causing hurt feelings. Other managers feel completely unprepared, due to their lack of training or people savvy, to deliver effective feedback. Some managers are so uncomfortable about discussing performance that they try to disguise their feedback with a "praise sandwich," talk around the issues (without addressing them directly), or simply dodge the conversation altogether.²

One of the most effective ways to deliver impactful feedback is to start with a “coach approach.” By changing the frame used to deliver feedback—from “window gazing” to “mirror holding”—leaders at all levels can adopt a coaching mindset driven by a partnership model built on development and growth. Not only does this approach lead to more helpful conversations about performance, but it plays to people’s strengths, flows with the rhythm of work, and produces healthier relationships between managers and their teams.

A coach approach to giving feedback starts with asking questions (especially those that address “what went *right*?”). Rather than presume facts or prescribe solutions, leaders should aim to learn as much as they can about a situation from the employee’s point of view. Ask questions that focus on employees’ strengths and successes. As they reflect on these peak moments, they’ll shed light on how they got there—and how leaders can partner with them to succeed again. Some examples of strengths-focused questions include:

- What brought you the most satisfaction while working on this campaign?
- What have you learned about yourself from working on this project?
- Did this particular task play to your strengths?

Attentive leaders may detect new pieces of information that change the makeup of their feedback. For employees, these questions provide opportunities to retrace performance highlights and describe significant accomplishments along the way.

Just as athletic coaches give real-time guidance from the sidelines, leaders who adopt a coach approach in the office need to match their message to the moment. They don’t wait until review season rolls around to hold conversations about work. Instead, they provide just-in-time feedback that turns the very nature of work into a model for partnership.

For example, when managing a relatively small team, consider a 15-2-1 approach: devote fifteen minutes every two weeks to coaching each employee. Scheduling time to talk about performance under relaxed conditions helps normalize feedback as something that happens routinely between managers and employees, not just when something unexpected comes up (or goes terribly wrong). If a team is too large to command this much time, consider “chunking” it into smaller groups of employees and scheduling casual meetups based on project functions or team roles. Whether the meetings are one on one or in small groups, the

effect—weaving feedback into the rhythm of work—can be equally powerful.

Acting more like a coach can relieve managers of having to go through the prescriptive (and often uncomfortable) typical feedback ritual: a hasty run-through of recent accomplishments followed by a lengthier (and often limited) analysis of deficits and improvements. In its place, managers engage in thoughtful conversation with employees about their current strengths and future goals—and ways to improve and achieve them.

The coach approach also gives managers a chance to flip the feedback model and ask employees about how their managers can help them pursue their most important priorities for growth. This shift still keeps the focus of the conversation on actionable change, but comes across as far more supportive and less threatening than traditional approaches. Some examples of questions to prompt employees for their feedback include:

- How can I help you take action on this?
- Is there something I can do to help you achieve your goals?
- How can I help you recreate the conditions of your success?

The best leaders don’t force others to become miniature versions of themselves. Rather, they inspire everyone to become the grandest and best versions of themselves. A coach approach that’s powered by partnership provides the framework for that support—and allows people to set the terms for their own personal and professional successes.

Joe Hirsch is the managing director of Semara Partners and the author *The Feedback Fix*. This piece originally appeared on the Workhuman blog at www.workhuman.com/resource-center and was reprinted with permission. Workhuman (www.workhuman.com) is a leading provider of social recognition solutions, trusted by some of the most admired companies in the world to inspire and energize employees and create best places to work. Through award-winning SaaS technology and proven methodologies, Workhuman empowers HR and business leaders to take a modern, more strategic approach to recognition programs.

1. Francesca Gino. 2016. “Research: We Drop People Who Give Us Critical Feedback.” *Harvard Business Review* website, September 16, hbr.org/2016/09/research-we-drop-people-who-give-us-critical-feedback.
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Mental Health in the Workplace

BY LANCASTER SAFETY

Thirty years ago, mental health was a taboo subject in the workplace, where it was discussed rarely and only in hushed tones around the water cooler. People who struggled with mental health issues were often described euphemistically (and incorrectly) as “having a nervous breakdown.” This kind of misinformation hasn’t made mental illness in the workplace go away, though. For example, the World Health Organization estimates that depression afflicts 264 million people worldwide, making it “one of the leading causes of disability;” combined, depression and anxiety are responsible for lost productivity in the amount of \$1 trillion per year.¹

Those numbers represent just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the impact that mental health issues can have on companies. Fortunately, there’s been a sea change in recent years about how the business world talks about—and responds to—mental health concerns in the workplace. Today, mental illness is now recognized as very real, very treatable, and something that can affect anyone.

Because of the stigma attached to mental illness, it’s not always easy for employees to open up about it with supervisors or other co-workers. Often this barrier is removed when a corporate leader opens up about his or her own issues, thus creating a safe environment in which people no longer feel the need to hide these issues. Sometimes, no longer having to try to hide a mental illness actually relieves some of that anxiety, particularly when someone discovers that some of the people with whom he or she interacts every day have dealt with the same challenges.

Work-related injuries can have a significant effect not just on physical health but on mental health as well. Postinjury depression, for instance, is an underreported yet very prevalent condition that can manifest in the injured employee as anxieties about the injury, lost wages, whether his or her job will be waiting when he or she returns to the workplace, and other concerns. Solid company policies for how to manage and support employees on leave are vital to the recovery

process, which includes keeping in regular contact with injured employees so they know that the organization has not forgotten them.

Forward-thinking companies recognize the importance of investing in employee mental health. Most businesses today take mental health issues seriously and actively work to address stress, fatigue, and anxiety in the workplace. The first step is to increase managers’ and employees’ awareness of the signs of depression:

- Weight change
- Withdrawal from others
- Changes in self-care or appearance
- Personality changes
- Unusually sad mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Indecisiveness or confusion
- Forgetfulness
- Increased self-criticism²

Being able to identify the issue and having a solid plan in place to address it promptly are vital first steps to helping someone get on the path to recovery.

But an employer can do only so much. Getting employees to actually use available resources can prove difficult: one recent study found that “roughly 4 in 10 adults with mental health disorders do not seek treatment.”³ Because the stigma surrounding mental illness is one big reason for this avoidance, organizations need to “rebrand” mental health so that all employees feel comfortable enough to seek help when they need it. Not only does successful treatment help employees live their fullest lives, but it can also bring long-term benefits to their companies, too.

Lancaster Safety Consulting Inc. is dedicated to helping its clients achieve a safe workplace through a world-class occupational safety and health program with onsite training. Lancaster Safety can be reached at lancastersafety.com/contact/.

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