

Management and Performance Associates – September - October, 2016

Imagine...

“When I was 5 years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down ‘happy.’ They told me I didn’t understand the assignment, and I told them they didn’t understand life.” —John Lennon

To continue with John Lennon, and the lyrics of “Imagine” (one of the 20th century’s most fantastic songs) “You may say I am a dreamer”. Was he? Are we? This month we take this concept up a notch. Can we be happy in the corporate world? This newsletter explores the conditions that may lead to happiness at the office....Or not.

As we transition from Lennon to the office, perhaps we should substitute the word happy with something different: motivated, engaged, or involved. In other words, enjoying the tasks and the work we do. This could happen if management does two things:

a) Hiring the “right” people

As we emphasized many times in these articles – and in our classes – the process always starts at the hiring stage. The whole selection and interviewing process is about finding a candidate that gets excited by performing the tasks that will be part of his/her daily routine. There is no magic to make people “happy” at the office if they have to perform tasks – eight hours a day – that make them unhappy. The interview is critical in determining if they get excited or not by such tasks. Remember, a task that may be seem boring by one person, may be seen as exciting by another person. The job of a leader is to determine if this candidate “fits the profile” or not.

b) Creating a healthy work environment

This is where management has critical responsibilities like:

- Delegating tasks and projects according to motivational profile
- Using the appropriate style as required by the situation
- Coaching and providing feedback, in order to ensure staff development
- Mentoring employees around career issues and navigating the corporate culture

Please check past issues of our newsletters to expand on the above topics. For the remainder of this article we will focus on other critical issues which are necessary to create an inclusive work environment.

Ensuring an inclusive work environment

Most of the literature – and training programs – about inclusive environment connects the issue to diversity. We agree that diversity has a lot to do with it, as people who have different life experiences will bring different points of view to the table. Think of your experiences throughout life as part of a group and how that impacts the way you see things, your way of thinking, operating, making decisions, what is seen as right or wrong. Those experiences are different. Not better or worse, just different and depend on your race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, education, etc.

Teams are naturally diverse (unless we are hiring clones of ourselves), due to the factors listed above, and as a consequence, individuals

have different points of view on different issues. The million dollar question is: do they feel comfortable voicing their disagreements and differing opinions? Are they afraid of repercussions? This is all a consequence of the leadership style that leaders have imposed on their teams.

In a class for a client regarding diversity some months ago, a participant made the following comment:

“I have two daughters, who are identical twins. Obviously, they come from the same parents, they live according to the same family values, same religion, same socio-economic status, they attend the same school and they live in the same house. That’s where the similarities end. They have completely different interests, motivations and behave completely different.” That’s what we call, “diversity among equals,” — invisible differences. That brings a completely different angle to inclusive leadership.

Exploring differences

Effective leaders create an inclusive environment where people feel safe to verbalize their opinions, regardless of their visible or invisible diversity. This is where many leaders feel uncomfortable with the concept, as they see it as giving the power to the staff, or having to accept opinions that they disagree with.

We like to emphasize the word “explore”. Explore their ideas in order to understand them. Suspend judgment, especially when their idea, at first, seems unrealistic. Ask instead of saying “this is never gonna work”.

Please allow us to finish with a definition. A real inclusive environment is one where people feel that they belong, that their ideas are taken into consideration, that they are not treated as five

year olds, that both their experience and expertise are valued. They are asked, not told. Managers treat the team equitably. There are no favorites. It is up to us, as leaders, to make it happen, and leverage the team’s natural diversity.

Research says that high performing diverse teams deal positively with disagreements and therefore their performance is maximized and innovation is accomplished. Because of exposed conflicts (disagreements), individuals may feel that they are not performing well, so leaders need constantly to:

- a) Emphasize that bringing up disagreements makes the process more productive
- b) Provide tangible examples of what the team is accomplishing.

MAPA Consulting can help you and your team to develop these competencies.

See you next time. As always, we welcome your feedback