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Engaging Employees the Hard Way

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In my last post I mentioned the employee satisfaction level (45%) recently reported by The Conference Board and concluded by asking "whose fault is this anyway?"

When I've asked similar questions, I get a range of answers. Some are adamant that it is the leader's fault. Some say the employee should switch jobs if they are so dissatisfied. Others can't come up with an answer.

Here's the answer: It is the leader's fault *and* the employee's fault. In organizations with an effective workplace culture, all parties have a sense of ownership.

In creating a culture of ownership and in turn a productive workplace, we often write about what leaders should do. **I'm going to look at the flip side of the coin and point out what leaders shouldn't do** if they want to contribute to a culture of trust, employee engagement, or team building.

1. As your organization's leader, **DON'T** be so intensely focused on results that you forget people are your most important means of getting to those results. A quick story: Years ago, during the first six months of becoming a CEO, I learned this the hard way. I overused the phrase "I expect" and the majority of my interactions with my team were about what they were doing to deliver the numbers. Thank goodness a combination of my own experience, an executive coach, and feedback from a couple people on my team helped me realize that the intense focus on results was backfiring. Clearly, a productive workforce requires building engaged employees.
2. **DON'T** ask for input and then ignore it. This approach squashes open communication in the workplace. This approach says "I don't care about your ideas or expertise." Without communication and caring, building trust is unlikely. Guess what? Poor communication + minimal trust = less than optimal results.
3. **DON'T** decide that you are going to launch an initiative (large or small) to improve employee engagement unless you plan to follow through. Not surprisingly, this reinforces a perception that you as the leader really don't care about employees and you can't be counted upon to do what you say you will do. And that goes back to one of my beginning points: In a great workplace, the culture of ownership contributes to results.

This list of "don'ts" is endless. Have you been on the receiving end of a don't? As a leader, have you learned a valuable lesson from a don't? Those of us at Winning Workplaces would love to hear your story.

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