Six Ways to Solve The People Thing...

So You Can Focus On Your Real Work

By Heidi Croot

Q: "I sometimes think managing people is a lot tougher than my real job, which is to get the right information to the right people at the right time. How can I spend less time spinning my wheels on people issues so I can get my work done?"

A: So you're looking for a strategy that will help you get your work done? ***Have I got a solution for you:***

Spend even more time on people issues!

I don't mean to be a smart aleck, truly, I don't. But I feel passionate about this one, and want to offer you an alternative lens through which to see your world.

First, though, I don't have a clear view of your situation, so let me start by making two assumptions:

- You're a manager and people report to you.
- These people presumably help you get your work done.

If this is incorrect, let me know and we can start over with the facts.

The facts we do know are these: you're committed to achieving your outcomes - the right info to the right people at the right time - and that's great.

You also see time spent with your people as an impediment to getting the work done, and that is woefully self-limiting.

Two of your values immediately make themselves known (values, of course, being the invisible rudder driving your behavior). One: you have a strong work ethic. Two: you believe your work product is entirely dependent on you.

The beauty of values is you're free to select or reject them as you gain clarity around how they may be helping or hindering you in achieving your personal goals.

Here's an alternative value you might consider adopting - one that has earned currency in the business world because of its positive results...and you have certainly declared that you're interested in results.

Good leadership involves caring for people, and caring for people creates a climate for creative productivity.

Leading and caring for people may not come naturally to a lone ranger, but it can be learned...especially once you make the connection between leadership and creative productivity.

Connect the dots!

Here are six dots you can connect to put that all-powerful principle of caring leadership and productivity to work for you.

1. Communicate your expectations

Your people are paralyzed until you share with them what you want them to do and what you want them to achieve. People disrespect managers who don't communicate.

Tell your employees what specific outcomes you want them to achieve. Then ask them to tell you what they understood you to say. Then talk it over to gain clarification. Then write it down, and refine it. Chat about it some more. Revisit it and rewrite it. Don't ever stop.

2. Provide needed support

Your people need to be supported with the right technology, tools and information to do their work to your satisfaction. It's your job to provide this support. Ask them what they need. Then make it happen. Keep asking.

3. Set the bar (and give up control)

Your people need opportunities to prove themselves so they can feel they're making a difference. Give them meaty assignments. Agree on outcomes and then get out of the way.

Set the bar high and bend over backwards to help them win. Let them be accountable; indeed, hold them accountable.

As a loner, you must grit your teeth and find the courage to expect your gifted, competent people to contribute and to perform. Let me ask you this: ever seen a quarterback who can win without the rest of the team?

4. Recognize, encourage, thank, acknowledge, and praise

Empirical evidence says the number one reason employees quit work is because they don't feel valued as contributing human beings. You, as the supervisor, are accountable for filling this need.

Impossible to recognize, encourage, thank, acknowledge, and praise too much – this is the hill I would die on.

If you're unsure about this all-important role, pick up a copy of D.B. Gandy's "30 Days to a Happy Employee". Or listen to Stephen Covey who, in "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People", said, "Next to physical survival, the greatest need of a human being is...to be affirmed, to be validated, to be appreciated."

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5. Care about your people

Be real, be natural, be interested and above all, be honest. Trust and respect your people. Listen with everything you've got.

People bring their whole selves to work. (Honesty and respect, by the way, mean addressing performance issues head on. Another topic for another time.)

6. Provide training and education

The more skillful and knowledgeable your people become, the more they can support you in getting the right information to the right people at the right time. The more adept and successful you and your team become, the more opportunities you may be able to open up for yourselves: new mandates, new challenges, new information for new people. (All of which is called "having fun at work".)

Bottom line:

Getting the right information to the right people at the right time isn't about you in a quiet office being heroic. It's about noise and give-and-take and encouragement and interdependence. Especially interdependence. It's about two steps forward and one step back. It's about building a collective intelligence, learning lessons together, and creating energy.

If you haven't experienced the rewards of a team whose members appreciate one another and know where they're going, my goodness – do yourself and your people a favor – get out of your office and start listening. It starts there.

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