

Feng Shui

Targeting Employee Retention

According to a recent **Brookings Institute** study, 85% of American companies' assets are human talent — not machinery, electronics or other tangibles. This means leaders must shift their thinking from past strategies to meet today's needs by creating effective employee relationships, and with much less stress. Energy drainers such as divisive cubicle walls and harsh paint colors can have a negative impact on the bottom line.

So, how does today's leader remove the energy drainers from the workspace, and then focus positive energy on improving creativity, interdependence and profitability? The answer can be as simple as changing the color of the walls.

Transformational solutions should be easy to implement, inexpensive and results-oriented. The following suggestions are based on Feng Shui principles, which will help you build a 21st century bridge to higher employee retention and job satisfaction while increasing productivity, efficiency and profits.

REMOVE BARRIERS

Human resources matter — they are your biggest asset. Evaluate workplace surroundings to see what is hampering your employees' ability to concentrate and be productive. Is there clutter everywhere? Are there boxes to be tossed, papers to be filed and inefficient organizational tools? The fact is, even in this electronic age, we are drowning in paperwork and clutter. Find ways now to eliminate the clutter and organize their space so your employees can focus.

Are cubicles and walls standing in the way of communicating with others and resolving problems? Reorganize your employees' workspace by tearing down those walls or replacing them with something clear so their space is more expansive rather than caged. The last thing most Generation X, Millennials and Generation Y workers want to do is sit in a cubicle for the rest of their lives.

PAINT THE WALLS

Look at what is going on around you, in your office surroundings and workplace environment. Are there certain areas that provide calm and others where chaos rules the day? Paint the walls a different color. Each color provides energy and has either a positive or negative effect on productivity and relationships.

Get rid of that impersonal white or gray, and replace it with calming light green or blue in chaotic high tension areas. These colors work well in IT areas, hospitals, manufacturing and deadline-oriented spaces such as newsrooms. In areas that are customer-employee relations oriented, or have any contact with clients, paint the walls a soft earth tone such as light terra cotta. This color enhances communication.

By Pat Heydlauff



COMMUNICATION IS KEY

While technology provides instant access to everything and everyone, it also limits the employee's ability to communicate and connect with others. The advances technology has provided in the form of instant communication are great except they are also impersonal connections, void of any feeling or emotion. Great care must be taken to compensate for its hard-edged impersonal energy.

Because communicating electronically is very impersonal, surprise an employee or client with an actual phone call instead of texting or emailing. Stop by her/his desk in person. If you receive a phone message from someone — return it. You automatically receive some satisfaction or emotional connection through hearing the message but the person that called is still electronically impoverished, waiting for your return call.

HARMONY THROUGH MUSIC

While there is a massive amount of research done on the negative side effects of noise pollution, there is even more written about the positive impact and benefits of specific types of music, when listened to regularly. Research shows that certain kinds of music (eg. classical) can improve self-perception, reduce anxiety, and produce a feeling of calm, while increasing creativity and productivity.

ADD LIFE TO THE WORKPLACE

If your daily routine is filled with computers, big screen communications, iPods, cell phones and other electronic devices, make sure you balance all of that hard, impersonal energy technology with something living. Plants, small indoor trees and aquariums provide great living energy in the workplace. For example, choose plants that reach upward (not downward like ivy) to energize the health of the business, the flow of new ideas and income. Aquariums can be any size and shape. They can also be used as a clear spacer between employees to replace cubicle walls.

Employee retention need not be a dilemma in today's environment. It just needs a different approach. Begin your leadership transformation by being aware of the differences in doing business with a whole generation of new employees — and then creating transformational change through using a few basic Feng Shui principles.

The result: increased efficiency and effectiveness plus improved client and employee relations, which lead to increased bottom-line profits.

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Human Resources

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL TEAM



By Bruce Hein

Building a successful team can be a challenge. As businesses realize the importance of people working together as a team to accomplish company goals, it's important for managers to have the knowledge to build a successful team.

To build an effective team, managers must first know the difference between a group and a team. A group is often defined as several people who come together for a specific purpose but work independently from each other. For a group to be considered a team, certain characteristics must be present.

According to Dr. Meredith Belbin, a British researcher and management theorist who spent nine years studying team behavior, the most effective teams have the following characteristics: an understanding and commitment to their role within the team, a shared sense of purpose and the ability to share and contribute to team goals, strong leadership with the ability to manage conflict when it arises and make decisions, trust and support among members and communication between team members.

UNDERSTANDING ROLES

To help determine roles among staff members, managers need to place employees according to their strengths into three categories: action-oriented, people-oriented and idea-oriented. Once management determines roles and communicates them to the team, each member will know how they affect the team's success, resulting in a higher level of commitment to the team.

CLARIFYING GOALS

After management has determined team roles, it's important to create a clear understanding of what the goals are for the department so there is a shared sense of purpose among the team. Managers who explain the team's direction and goals will have more effective teams. To keep members focused and motivated, goals need to be challenging and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely).

DEFINING RESPONSIBILITIES

Managers should clearly explain what each person's responsibility for each goal is and why achieving that goal is important. Many times, there are different projects and tasks required to reach team goals, so team members might have different responsibilities depending on the task. For example, one employee might be a support member on one project and a project leader on the next, depending on their strengths. If there's more than one person competing for a certain role on a project, divide the responsibilities and make each person accountable for their section.

ESTABLISHING LEADERS

Management must assign strong team leaders to ensure a team's effectiveness. Team leaders serve as supervisors, assistant managers or project advisors. These individuals must be able to make decisions, resolve conflicts among team members, delegate tasks and ensure that team goals are being met. Team leaders are responsible for driving the team's success, and they must also be able to encourage, motivate and support fellow members.

TRUST AND SUPPORT

Effective teams must trust and support each other. Managers can develop this by allowing team members to take full responsibility for projects and tasks, and then standing by them through their progress. Team leaders and upper management need to provide continual support and loosen the reigns on projects. This will show employees that leadership trusts their judgment and values their expertise.

OPEN COMMUNICATION

Another key component in building a successful team is encouraging employees to have open communication. Open dialogue, both formal and informal, allows team members to contribute ideas and suggestions on projects. Team meetings should be held on a regular basis to give members the opportunity to report progress and share success stories on projects. This is also a great opportunity to allow team members to speak freely about personal interests or weekend plans, which encourages employees to engage in more communication among the team.

Whether managers or supervisors are building a new team or trying to strengthen an existing one, following these tips will help leaders develop more effective and successful teams.

Bruce Hein (bruce.hein@expresspros.com) is franchise owner in Sarnia and Brantford, Ontario of Express Employment Professionals.

TRAINING FOR SOLAR ENERGY WORKERS

TORONTO, ON - Workers in Canada's growing solar-energy sector will receive skills support from the federal government. The federal government will partner with the Electricity Sector Council to develop new occupational standards for solar equipment installers. In addition, the government will support the Association of Canadian Community Colleges as they develop a national curriculum for designers and installers of solar energy systems, to be shared with colleges and institutes across Canada. Courses will include design and installation for commercial and residential solar hot water system and for various applications and sizes of photovoltaic systems.

"The projects our government is supporting today will help us reach our goal of having 90% of Canada's electricity derived from non-emitting sources by 2020," said Lisa Raitt, Minister of Natural Resources in a speech at the Canadian Solar Industries Association, Solar Conference 2008.

LAKESIDE LOGISTICS AWARDS

OAKVILLE, ON - Lakeside Logistics has awarded 12 of its Tier 1 carriers with Vision Green Globe Awards, recognizing their support of the SmartWay Partnership and overall commitment to the environment. Companies recognized: Bison Transport, Brian Kurtz Trucking, Caravan Logistics, Challenger Motor Freight, Kriska

Holdings, MacKinnon Transport, Yanke Group, Penner International, SGT 2000, Team Logistics, TST Overland Express and XTL Transport. The Vision Green program was developed to facilitate carbon neutral status. The SmartWay Partnership was developed by the US Environmental Protection Agency and the freight industry to implement creative approaches to reduce energy and the environmental impact of shipping.

EMERSON TO HEAD BC GRID

VANCOUVER, BC - Former federal cabinet minister David Emerson has been named CEO and board chair of the BC Transmission Corp., which works with BC Hydro in delivering electricity across the province.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO SECOND CAREER

TORONTO, ON - Ontario has expanded access to its Second Career <http://www.ontario.ca/secondcareer> program to help more laid-off workers get skills training for high-demand jobs in their communities.

Through Second Career, announced in the 2008 Budget, the province is investing \$355 million to help 20,000 laid-off workers make the transition to new jobs. The program is part of the \$2 billion Skills to Jobs Action plan that includes a number of employment assistance programs offered through Employment Ontario.

Employment Ontario provides training and employment services to more than 900,000 people annually. Since 2003, the Ontario economy has created more than half a million net new jobs.

Second Career provides opportunities for:

- p Workers laid off as far back as January 1, 2005;
- p Laid-off workers who have taken an interim job to make ends meet;
- p Short-term training options (less than six months) for laid-off workers who are not eligible for Employment Insurance;
- p Additional financial assistance in some instances to cover expenses for the cost of academic upgrading, living away from home while participating in training, and dependent care.

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