



"The greatest waste of human resource is staff complacency. Companies spend millions of dollars to educate, train, and equip them with knowledge, skills and resources to enable them to perform. Too much effort and time has been focused on getting people to be more competent. Yet little is done to eliminate complacency which is a productivity damper in organisations." - DR VICTOR S.L.TAN

ELIMINATING COMPLACENCY IN THE WORKPLACE

WHAT is complacency? Complacency is a sense of excessive satisfaction which prevents people from addressing the real issues that require change. The signs of complacency are very telling. Here are some examples:

- People skirt around the real issues and address only the convenient ones
- They preach about change but do not see through until it yields the desired results
- Leaders let people get away with poor performance
- Staff are not motivated to achieve more, or take more responsibilities
- There is no consistent follow-up. Many progress reviews are ad hoc and crisis-driven

Companies cannot afford to have a complacent workforce. Many companies like to believe that their human resource is their assets. This can only be true if leaders find ways to eliminate complacency in the workforce and make them productive.

The following are some ways to help eliminate complacency in organisations.

■ Address the Real Issue, Not the Symptoms

In a downturn where sales start to plummet, it is crucial to ensure people take the heat.

Many will be lured by the escapism temptation, and find an easy way out. They will address the symptoms and recommend some quick fixes.

For example, when the demand goes down and competition becomes keener, it is all too easy to succumb to reducing prices of products and services.

Reducing prices will certainly lead to complacency. It obviates the need to improve. People will no longer explore ways to differentiate their products or services besides price.

And that will certainly lead to deteriorating profits and zoom the company to doom. The real issue here goes beyond cost, it is about staff's commitment and resourcefulness in combating the slowdown in sales.

■ Engage Staff to Resolve Issues

The role of the leader is not to provide all the solutions to their staff. Enough damage has been done in school where teachers think for their students and feed them with all the right answers. The more leaders get their people to think for themselves and come up with their right solutions, the less complacent they will become.

This makes perfect sense as it is not possible for a leader to be aware

of all the actual happenings in the operational details.

By engaging employees to participate and helping the company to address the real issues, they will also develop more commitment and a sense of belonging which by themselves have intrinsic motivation.

Such motivation is more meaningful and sustainable than just mere monetary rewards.

■ Set High Standards

Nothing breeds complacency faster than low goals and expectations. Such low standards are often too well justified for a company's own good.

All too often, leaders like to rationalise that the company is not doing too badly compared to many others. They rationalise they have done relatively well considering how far they have come.

Of course, it is all too convenient to argue that given the challenging economic and competitive situation, the company is doing pretty well.

Michelangelo, the multi-talented Italian painter, architect, sculptor and poet said it best: "The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark".

■ Measure and Monitor Progress Regularly

James, the supervisor of manufacturing firm learnt the

hard way. To build a "more trusting environment", he decided to get rid of the weekly output progress meeting and allow each individual to monitor their own progress.

After two months, the production output fell by 20%. Monitoring progress is not about not trusting others; it is about guiding progress.

Without clear measurements and frequent monitoring of progress, complacency will begin to set in. People will feel that what they do matter little as no one is paying attention. There is no motivation and soon they will just do the bare minimum.

According to Peter Drucker, the father of management: "What gets measured, gets done". The tendency of the human behavior is doing what is inspected and not what is expected.

■ Hold People Accountable for Their Results

There is a magic in holding people accountable for results. It conveys two very important messages.

One, the belief in the person's ability. The other, the importance of the responsibility the person play. To be effective, this must be communicated in a positive, encouraging, and confident manner.

It is not about telling people to do whatever they can and "to try your best". It is about communicating to people that their results is an important part of the big "jigsaw puzzle".

The success of the company depends on each one delivering the results they are accountable for. Only by each and everyone contributing their bits, can the whole "picture" be complete.

■ Reward and Recognise Based on Performance

People want to feel important. To motivate people to continue to perform, leaders simply have to reward them fairly based on performance and penalise those who do not. And that is an effective way to eliminate complacency in the workplace.