

By Dr Victor S.L. Tan

Leaders today can no longer wait for opportunities to come before they start their improvement initiatives. Every leader must start at exactly where he or she is and begin to create positive change for the company.

They can explore change initiatives within the company and outside. In the external environment, they need to be more discerning about customer needs, competitors, business opportunities and industry changes, and their impact on the company. Within the company, leaders may explore improvements in quality, productivity, communication, teamwork and staff morale.

MAKING WORK FUN AND MEANINGFUL

For a start, focus on changing the way people look at work. The corporate world is full of people in search of meaning and fun in their work. For example for Gen Ys are keen to work at a place that is innovative, fun and open. In Google's headquarters in Zurich, Switzerland, meeting "pods" in the style of Swiss chalets, igloos, fireman poles to enable easy access between floors, as well as a slide to the cafeteria are all part of the office. It is all part of the design to develop a creative, fun and open working office.

The key to productivity is to engage people fully at work. Leaders must reckon that people's lives are invaluable and more than just salaries. Employees today are in search of meaning:

**"What is the meaning of my life at work?
Why am I here? Where am I going?"**

Besides having a fun workplace, people want to achieve a sense of satisfaction and a feeling of importance from their work. They want to see the big picture relating to tasks they are doing in contributing to the company's goal, the industry, the community and the nation. They want an inspiring and meaningful vision of a better future not just for the company, but also for them. This vision must provide people with a sense of meaning, fun, creativity, pride, aspiration and accomplishment. Henry Ford Sr said it well: "There is no happiness except in the realisation that we have accomplished something".

LEAD THE CORPORATE CULTURE CHANGE

Corporate culture is the way people do things in an organisation. It is a set of norms, comprising beliefs, attitudes, core values and behavioural patterns, shared by people in organisations. Before a leader can start to change the behaviour of people and achieve the desired results, he or she must first understand the existing corporate culture of the organisation. This can be carried out through an accurate instrument called the Corporate Culture Survey Assessment.

Leaders must lead this initiative of ascertaining the existing corporate culture and defining the desired corporate culture to ensure the wellbeing of the company and its people.

Internally, people must be competent, motivated and cooperative. Externally, the organisation must be able to compete and survive in the increasingly complex and changing environment. The strategic role of leaders is to lead the corporate culture change to ensure the company's continued success and growth in future years.

FOLLOW UP ON ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS

One of the great ills of organisations today is the tendency towards complacency, causing a lack of follow-up on accountability for results. While many organisations are quick to introduce targets, they are slow in holding people accountable for the

results. The strategic role of leaders is to develop a "live" Performance Management System that has clear KPIs (key performance indicators) with a well-defined accountability for results and a firm follow-up through actions. In this respect, leaders must not just focus on doing the "nice things", but they need to do the right things. And, one right thing to do is follow up with specific people who miss their mark in their performance and hold them accountable for coming up with concrete plans to make good results. While leaders can provide opportunities to people to improve results, they should not tolerate complacency and apathy of people towards performance.

There are two kinds of people, based on the way they respond to change. The first kind will change when they see the light. The second kind will change only when they feel the heat. Providing the rationale for change will move the first kind. To move the second kind, there is a need for follow-up actions on accountability for results.

MOTIVATE WITH RECOGNITION AND REWARDS

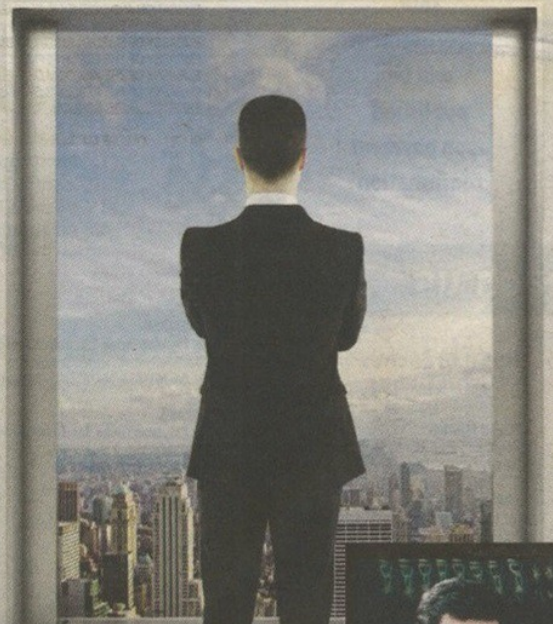
One common trait of many corporate leaders is their non-committed role in motivating people with recognition and rewards. The flaw in their thinking lies in the perception that they do not have the power to make decisions on rewards. Many argue that they do not want to build false hopes for their staff and, hence, they rationalise that there is little they can do to motivate people. Firstly, leaders must realise that the power to motivate people goes beyond monetary rewards. Leaders can motivate through exemplary leadership with their own behaviour and actions.

They can also single out people and provide them with words of encouragement or compliments when appropriate. Sincere gestures of care and inspiration can go a long way in motivating staff in their work.

Secondly, leaders must know that while many of them do not have direct decision-making power, they can wield a lot of influence in the rewarding and recognition of deserving people through recommendations and persistence in looking for and supporting high performers in organisations.

In conclusion, leading positive change is no longer an option, but a critical need as organisations struggle to motivate employees to perform and retain talent. The way forward is to lead positive change through developing a meaningful, creative and fun workplace with clear accountability for results, supported by fair rewards and recognition.

LEADING POSITIVE CHANGE



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