

Leading Teams: Is Day 2, Too Late?



Progressive Tips for Today's
Progressive Leaders

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Leading Teams: Is Day 2 is Too Late? Yes...

In my ongoing discussions with you regarding Today's Millennial Employees this is going to seem a little weird. And you thought that Gen Xers were aloof.

It is not the first time I have recommended turning a process or an organization upside down. But by now, I hope you see, that at least in my own mind there is a method behind the madness.

In my corporate work, I often hear "we need to be better at "on-boarding" yet it all begins with a perfunctory meeting with HR and a ton of forms.

Interviewing Today's Employees

I am going to make a few assumptions here. I am going to assume that you have seen a premise or two in my articles or perhaps my speaking engagements that you recognize as valid. My expectations are not so lofty as to think you agree with me across the board, especially on management styles. But I am going to assume you will try to shift your management technique, if ever so slightly, to meet the different needs of the unique characteristics of today's employee pool. You OK with that?

If that is the case, then let us make sure we address these issues not only as they apply to retaining and maximizing the potential younger employees, but also in attracting them to our place of business as well. Does that make sense? Remember the quote about the *Inc 500*, and 30 CEOs at or under the age of 30? And I told you that many of them "get it"?

Our organizations need to be competitive in the way we attract quality today's employees as well as being competitive in the sales and marketing arena. The facts are that many companies have already started making many of the changes we have discussed so far. And we need to get your group up to speed.

Let's assume that you consider programs I have written about, the Ambassador Program, or the Exchange Program or the QBM, the Weekly

Observation Sheets, or better yet, others you and your teams have developed or will develop. **Then why not take full advantage of what you have accomplished. Introduce those programs to prospective employees as early as the interview period?**

I just put on my glasses and re-read the Old Schooler's Management Handbook, from cover to cover, and I searched high and I searched low for the page that says these types of programs or cultural enhancements or vehicles for engagement need to remain confidential during the interview process. That page was not to be found, at least not by me.

Here are the givens: We know that younger employees have little or no trust in corporate America. And we are beginning to understand why they feel that way. We also know that by establishing equity and empowerment and ultimately engagement in our Millennials, we have a better chance of developing trust and loyalty. Let us use it to attract the best people we possibly can attract to our organizations. Or maybe you think it is a better testament to your management style not to attract the brightest employees, and instead rely on your management experience, which would make some of you experts in mediocrity. Can you say Wanna-Be?

If you are feeling open-minded, **I am going to put you to the test. Where does it say in your management handbook that the top manager has to conduct all the interviews?** Is it because of your extensive formal training in the interview process? Just how much formal training in interviews have you had? Or is it because you have had so much experience? Or you are the best at reading people?

Got ya! Then why are you having such a hard time with younger employees? It is because they are different than you are; I thought we covered that. Sorry to be abrasive but I am passionate about this point.

Can you imagine the effect on the employee candidate of another employee or recent hire, talking about employee equity and empowerment in your company, and listing the examples? Talk

about empowerment or engagement; are you strong enough to let go? Isn't that what management is all about?

Maybe in my ranting you missed my subtle point about training for interviews. **Do all your managers or HR people work off the same checklist?** Maybe that will be the next book, but please, let us make sure everyone is talking about the programs that our company offers to meet the needs of the today's employee pool, at the very least.

Time to move on. We are almost done.

Orientation

Recently I have tried preaching to different management teams about culture. For some reason there just does not seem to be a lot of interest in corporate cultures. Then why is it such a big deal to me?

Maybe it is due to the time I spent at Yamaha and witnessed how domestic and foreign corporate cultures could be radically different, but then yet meet the same basic emotional needs of employees. Or maybe it is just that I visit so many different cultures and leadership styles in my workshops, while most managers only experience a few different cultures. Or maybe I am more sensitive to the potential differences and the advantages of some versus others. I just do not know.

What I do know is that the elements of equity and empowerment are dynamic influences over today's employees. So much so that the shifts in corporate management paradigms I have been describing need to go beyond a program here and there to become inherent elements in our corporate culture. This would mean that they are present in every facet of the organization. Most importantly, they need to be introduced and be significant from Day One in the corporate life of the employee.

It is time for another metaphor. When I was researching my thesis for my MBA, Management Training in Small and Medium-Sized Companies, I spent a lot of time analyzing the culture at The Walt Disney Company in Orlando, including their management training programs.

I was enamored by the way they were able to change the language, change the mindset, and transform an hourly job into an employee experience, if that makes any sense. **From the first day at work, the management team at Disney started to instill their unique culture into the employees.** Even way back in those days, the late 80s, they not only recognized the value, but also insisted on changing the mindset of the workers to be consistent with their objectives.

On the first day, employees were expected to know the history of Mickey Mouse and the names of the Seven Dwarfs. And when I refer to employees, I am talking about custodial, maintenance, characters that did not even speak, and yes, even the executives. Every employee: can you imagine? What a great example of 100% participation.

Compare that to the cultural introduction a new hire experiences on his or her first day of work at your company. Potentially it may be the difference between a mouse and a duck. No offense to Donald of course.

I was touched by another example as well. When my daughter decided to go to Georgia Southern University, we signed up for the mandatory orientation weekend. I went with my daughter, reluctantly. If the truth were to be known, I went kicking and screaming.

During the weekend they had skits and speakers; they had tours and elective sessions of information in specific categories. It was well planned, and well executed. All geared to make the incoming freshman feel welcome and part of the family. The schedule was fast and furious, and interesting, really interesting. Talk about sound bites. **They gave quick interesting snapshots of programs. See, they understand the Millennial students, and what makes them tick. They also understand the relationship between orientation and culture.**

Compare that to your new hire's first day on the job. I am not suggesting a three-day dog and pony weekend in Statesboro, Georgia. But I am asking the question, what can we learn from this experience?

Now remember the new employee candidates. They process information quickly, in soundbites, and then move on. **That first day at work is critical and will set the tone for the long term. I encourage you to look at your orientation process from an entirely new perspective – the perspective of the new employee. And, potentially, you can enhance the first-day experience and provide equity to other employees, all at the same time. Can you see where I am going with this?**

Orientation Ideas

Do you believe in first impressions? How long do they last? Do you believe that they are accurate? If you answered yes, then the next question is how do we make first impressions work for us in dealing with a new hire?

First, arrange for all new hires to start on the same day if possible. Mondays or Fridays are optimum, and have your new hires experience the process as a team. If you are a smaller company and cannot afford to wait a week to get a team together, then make a team of at least two new hires; even that is better than solo. Before you judge me or dismiss this concept as unrealistic, finish the section. But younger employees work well in teams.

Video

In today's world your employees have the ability to build and edit their own version of your cultural and engaging video, focusing not on products, but culture, family, accomplishments, and personal success stories. Keep the managers out of it. It is a team activity, and engagement vehicle focus on culture.

Next, in the world of today's employee pool, months are like years. If you go down the video path, please update the video with new film, different employees every three months or so to keep it fresh. If your culture video shows an employee that has left the organization and is still in the video, you have done more harm than good.

Clearly the next step is to add the video to your website, again update or replace regularly!

This is going to sound trite to you when you first hear it, but stay with me, it can be powerful. **If you have a promotional video, shorter is better; play it for the new hire. Remember, use short sound bites of information.** If you have a television spot or radio commercials, now, on Day One, is the time to play them for the new hire. If you do not have a video, then try a scrapbook. **I am not talking about a kiddie-meal scrapbook, but one of those quarter-pounder types, those three-foot-high scrapbooks.**

Have each department make contributions (participation), a welcome card from senior management addressed to the name of the new hire (management support), or better yet, a welcome card signed by all the employees in the department.

Then fill the giant scrapbook/video with press releases, website images, photos of events, articles written by employees, departmental photos. Fill it with images that represent your success, and your people. And keep it updated. The cost is minimal, but the image will stay in the head of the Employee forever. The video/scrapbook is better than a lecture or tour, and the pictures graphically illustrate the culture of your organization.

Three years or more later, employees can still remember not only the images in the video/scrapbook but the person who turned the pages and took them through the book. Make sure this person knows about everything in the scrapbook. Having a Volume 1 and Volume 2 is also acceptable; just keep the exercise to 15 minutes. Remember, sound-bites.

Explain to all your existing employees how critical the first day can be. I do not suggest we make it a party, but the fact is, that it **is an event in the mind of the new hire.** Remember Georgia Southern? Is it that much different, really, in terms of the anxieties of the new hire? Do you see the parallels?

You might try implementing an orientation team representing all departments. Each department designates a representative, and that gives us 100% participation and equity in the process. I do not want to disrespect those in the HR department; I just think we need to re-invent the orientation process for Employees. It needs to be a non-management, a peer group experience.

Have each delegate present just five to ten minutes about his department, (3-4 minutes in a video) complete with literature or achievements. Pictures are critical. And rotate the orientation delegate every month, or every three months; keep it fresh for everyone. The program needs to be concise, well-organized, and brisk. This is another strong argument for singling out a single day for new hires to start.

I can hear you: “If they are here for a week and then we put them with a group, it is the same thing.” No, it is not, and you would be wrong. Can you remember your seventh day with your company? If logistics are still a concern, do the orientation on a Saturday morning two weeks before their actual first day. Or you might possibly try a 7:00 p.m. orientation during the week, for two hours. Sooner than the first day is better than a few days later, please trust me on this. Thus, the advantages to a video, but in person is still much more dynamic.

As a matter of fact, I recommend you do this before they go to HR to fill out their exemption papers, before they shake hands with the office pool, even before we identify the rest rooms or the time clock. ***Tell me when is it too early to start a culture of success?***

The desired result is when the employee fields his or her first telephone call, they do so with the positive culture of the company tattooed in their brain. The result is a culture of a success. This will instill pride in the organization, from the first hour, on the first day, and set the standards of success high above the norm of just another “McJob.”

If it works for Mickey it can work for you. It is not complicated, nor is it expensive, but it will make a difference. These types of activities do not need to be limited to big corporations. Let your employees be creative.

If you want to take it to the next level, try a follow-up meeting every quarter including all the new hires and ask them for their input on how to make the orientation program even better. Who would know better than this group about how to improve the process? Now we have another teambuilding question, as well as the Employee's first exposure to equity in the systems of the company. Awesome!

Love to get your thoughts,

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