

So I Can't Do This Alone?

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Do you get caught in the trap of acting like a heroic leader? As time frames and deliverables slip, do you jump in and take on more responsibility to turn things around? This may work in the short term but you can't sustain this over time. And your team will never be achieving the results that you want.

You must rely on your team (direct reports and their reports) to achieve the goals required for its success. To achieve the challenges in today's business environment, you have to get the best from your people. They have to put in the extra effort that is often needed to push a challenging goal to completion. So how do you get people to give their best?

The most effective way to improve productivity is to create a workplace climate that encourages workers to perform at their best; to expend discretionary effort, not just get by.

In our last issue, we described the Gallup research which found that only 29 percent of employees are motivated and engaged. Wow! These are terrible odds and they aren't in your favor. So what is a work environment that engages your people?

What Is Workplace Climate?

Workplace climate can be simply defined as "*what it feels like to work here*"— as experienced by members of the workgroup.

Why Is It Important?

It directly deals with motivation. How your employees view their work environment will determine how engaged and motivated they are to give their best. Research from the Hay Group has found that the workplace climate accounts for up to 30% of the difference in profit between high performing and low performing organizations.

How Do You Get a Handle on It?

David McClelland and his colleagues discovered that there are six key factors that influence an organization's working environment and the motivation of the employees:

- ❑ **Flexibility**—How free employees feel to innovate unencumbered by red tape
- ❑ **Responsibility**—Their sense of freedom to accomplish tasks and take calculated risks without constantly checking for approval
- ❑ **Standards**—The feeling that their manager sets high standards and challenging goals while encouraging performance improvement—challenging but attainable goals that are set by the organization and its employees
- ❑ **Rewards**—Employees recognize that rewards are allocated on the basis of performance and that praise outweighs threats and criticism
- ❑ **Clarity**—Employees know the mission and objectives of the company and work unit while also knowing what is expected of them
- ❑ **Team commitment**—People are proud to be a part of their work unit, cooperate with members of their team and trust their coworkers

What Can You Do to Improve the Workplace Climate of Your Group?

In this newsletter I'll address the first two factors that impact climate. In next months newsletter we will consider the other four factors that McClelland identified.

Enhancing Flexibility

This is one of the most important dimensions for creating motivated members of your team. To enhance flexibility you have to do two important things:

- ❑ *Minimize red tape and bureaucracy*
- ❑ *Foster innovation and new ideas*

Here are a few questions and suggestions to help you think about how your team views the flexibility they have to do their job and give their best:

Question: To what extent are the policies, procedures, and practices that you set or support getting in the way of people doing the job?

Suggestions:

- ❑ Meet with the people in your group to review policies and procedures with the goal of eliminating unnecessary ways of getting things done. This is the idea behind the famous “Work Out” process that Jack Welch made famous at GE.
- ❑ Propose new policies and procedures and seek employee feedback before implementing. Identify the procedures that seem like a waste of time. This probably cascades down to people on your team.

Question: How easy is it for people in your work group to have new and original ideas considered?

Suggestions:

- ❑ Be flexible; shift strategies; stay open and accept other viewpoints, and help put new ideas into practice. The tone that you set for exploring new ways of doing business and adding value to your customers is critical.
- ❑ Establish a systematic process for reviewing new ideas. Start by having a discussion of the mission critical areas that you and your team need to perform differently from today in order to deliver excellence. Then keep the focus on ideas for improvement with the team.

Enhancing Responsibility

Here are the two key factors to address to create a more powerful sense of responsibility.

- ❑ *Autonomy*
- ❑ *Risk Taking*

Consider the following to examine how you are doing:

Question: To what extent do you encourage people to do their jobs the way they see fit?

Suggestions:

- ❑ Use the group’s vision to provide the boundary for individuals to make decisions about how to fulfill their responsibilities.
- ❑ Set a minimum number of check-offs (depending on capability) in order to support people in using their discretion.

Question: To what extent do you encourage people to take calculated risks?

Suggestions:

- ❑ Be explicit about your expectations for experimenting and finding better ways to produce value for your customers and to increase operating effectiveness within the team.
- ❑ Then ensure that direct reports have sufficient room to act and regularly encourage them to exercise individual judgment and take calculated risks.

Final Thoughts for this Month:

No, you can't do it alone. Therefore, it is critical that you create a climate in which your team will want to give their best and willingly contribute their discretionary effort. This will lead to results that will make the team successful and produce excellence by your organization.

At times "climate" in the workplace has sounded vague and fuzzy to me. That's why I've found it important to look at the research and get specific about what motivating climate looks like and how to measure it. I can then take action with increased confidence and enable my clients to bring out the best from their teams.

I have been using some specific tools with my clients to assess how their direct reports see the workplace. One tool is based on the research of the Hay Group and measures the six dimensions outlined in this issue. Please give me a call whenever you would like to explore this application for you and your team.

John Cronkite works with leaders faced with the challenge of implementing change that will be sustained over time. Sustaining change requires effective leadership and top performing people. John will provide you with practical, hands on coaching and consulting to build your confidence and effectiveness at providing this leadership and bringing the best from your people. To contact John send an email to cronkite@dirigoconsulting.com and for more information about John and his work visit his website at www.dirigoconsulting.com.