💬 WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

To build or not to build? That's the inclusion question

by Brad Federman

Typically, an organization employs inclusion efforts because it notices there's a morale issue within a certain group or within the organization as a whole, a legal challenge has been filed against the organization, or there has been an effort to organize a union. Unfortunately, many inclusion or diversity efforts fail because they are reactive tactics used to pacify a group or groups. Even much of the discrimination and harassment training that exists is done to stay out of legal trouble or in direct response to a legal issue. What a large number of organizations fail to see is that a reactive effort to respond to workplace issues actually alienates and disenfranchises many employees.

Inclusion has become an approach to working with employees who are different or have special needs. Employees don't want to be treated well because they are different or because the organization is afraid of a union organizing effort. They want to consistently feel respected, included, and valued. You must develop a strong, clear, and productive culture to demonstrate respect, interest, and value in your employees on a consistent basis.

Two consistent aspects of a strong, clear, and productive culture are that it builds trust and reduces fear. Trust has to do with our "present interest." If my present interest is truly in the person in front of the team, my customer, and me, then I will create more trust. The opposite is also true. If my focus is on myself—self-interest—then trust levels will be reduced. The more self-interested we are, the more our relationships will suffer or be superficial because we cannot focus on other people and their needs when we are focused on ourselves. The challenge we face is that most of us are naturally self-interested; it's human nature. Our leaders must model an interest in others for a positive culture to be built.

Success is about reducing fear and anxiety. Everyone wants to be part of a winning team. So what makes up a winning team? Success has to do with our "present motive." The questions we should consistently ask ourselves in different situations are "What is my present motive?" or "Why am I making this decision?" If my present motive is centered on opportunity, meaning I am focused on what is possible, then I will create more success. The opposite is also true. If my focus is on risk, then I am trying to reduce my liabilities, and I will create less success or achievement.

We know that, too, is a continuum. The less we are able to work through our fears, the more likely we will be unsuccessful. There are two reasons for that phenomenon. The first is based on the concept that we cannot focus on opportunities when we are too worried about risk. Second, if we act on our fear, the very thing we fear most will come true.

The reality is that many companies have reacted too much to our national culture of litigation. We spend a great deal of time focusing on how to avoid being sued or investigated by a government agency. By responding to the current climate that way, we tend to create the very problem we wanted to avoid. Cultures that focus on creating an incredible place to work typically have fewer inclusion problems and fewer legal issues.

Here are some tips on creating a culture that is more inclusive:

✓ Create a leadership development process and program that is mandatory for all leaders.

✓ Develop a process for selecting the most appropriate leaders. Don't just promote employees who are good individual contributors.

✓ Ask employees for feedback on a regular basis—e.g., using 360 degree feedback tools and engagement surveys.

✓ Encourage people to talk face-to-face when possible rather than using e-mail.

✓ Discourage multitasking by asking people to work on the 20 percent that creates 80 percent of the impact rather than on everything.

✓ Be transparent. Although you cannot share everything, share as much as you can as soon as you can.

✓ Communicate in multiple ways and at multiple times.

✓ Get to know your employees—and know who they are, not just what they do. We tend to include people we understand.

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