
WHAT'S IMPORTANT | Volume II, Issue 3 | September 25, 2006

"What's Important" is a universal concern. The phrase resonates with an infinite number of meanings. What's important is both a question and an answer, depending on the situation.

What is corporate culture? Traditionally, it is considered the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that commonly unite an organization's employees. Leaders set the tone, and really good leaders set a tone in which all employees feel valued for their contribution to the organization's success.

These leaders recognize that surrounding themselves with a strong management team is an important start, but not nearly enough. They know that for their company to fully succeed, it needs talented, committed people at all levels. And, it needs leaders who recognize and nurture that talent and commitment, whether it is in the board room, on the front lines, in the back office, or in the warehouse. Creating this kind of caring, empowering culture not only brings out the best in employees, it can bring out the best in leaders as well.

John was a model employee. He operated a forklift for decades at the same international beverage distributor. His safety record was impeccable. He showed up for work every day and was always on time.

Until one day, he didn't show up at all.

His absence was sorely missed. After several days of no John and no word from him, the president of the company was concerned and decided to pay a personal visit to John's house to see if he was OK or if the family needed anything.

John's wife met the president at the door. Although John loved his job and the people he worked with, she said that he would not be able to return to work. She explained that when the company recently replaced all the forklifts with new computerized models, John could not operate the new machines, couldn't digest the manual, and couldn't navigate the controls, not because he didn't want to, but because he couldn't read.

The president was shocked to learn that one of his best, most reliable employees was illiterate. He was also shocked to learn that because John felt too ashamed to ask for help and too scared to share this secret, he walked away from a job he loved.

Rather than let technology and change push John out the door, the president considered another solution. Not only did he let John continue using the older, non-computerized forklift, he also started a literacy program for company employees and retirees. The innovative program improved the reading skills of hundreds of employees, boosted morale, generated positive media attention and became a national model for effective employee literacy programs.

By being aware, concerned and committed to employees at all levels, the president empowered his people, improved the corporate culture, and took a giant leap toward realizing his own leadership potential. Getting to know and genuinely caring about people throughout the organization can make the difference between success and failure – both at the most personal level and at the corporate level.

What's important is that valuing all people makes a leader, and an organization, more valuable.

Email me at chuck@durakis.com to share your thoughts.

Thanks,

Chuck