
WHAT'S IMPORTANT | Volume VI, Issue 6 | December 8, 2010

"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.

Every other Friday George's executive staff ate lunch together. Nothing fancy and always voluntary, those who were in town and available joined together in a simple meal that became less about eating and more about sharing.

George was a busy CEO, but he made these lunches a priority in his schedule because he recognized their clear value. Through these conversations he learned more about the staff – their interests, their talents, their concerns – than he did at during staff meeting or performance review.

The lunches became so popular that when directors from the regional offices were in town, they made a point of attending, too.

As the holidays approached the lunch conversations shifted to travel plans, parties and family feasts. Staff members talked enthusiastically about their personal contribution to each endeavor.

The Director of Business Development eagerly shared his secrets for making the perfect pork loin, which he would take for dinner to his mother-in-law's house. The VP of Human Resources admitted to being like a magician with party entertainment and decorations for the holiday fundraiser she annually helped plan. The VP of Marketing enjoyed creating year-in-review videos as stocking stuffers for her family.

It was clear that the employees received great joy in giving of themselves in these personal ways. George wanted to capture this enthusiasm and creativity within the office and during the work day as well.

He started by changing the office holiday party. Traditionally, professional caterers and party planners arranged every detail. This year, he invited the staff to plan it and infuse it with their personal touch.

It was a huge success. The holiday party went from the generic, ho-hum pleasantries of the past, to a rich, diverse and much more engaging expression of the company family. Rather than feel obligated, the staff felt invested in a fun evening.

The January management meeting buzzed with comments about the positive results of that one simple change in approach. George urged the senior leaders to use this new insight to cultivate opportunities for each staff member to offer his or her personal contribution during the work week.

Over the next six months, the leaders became more creative managers, the staff became even more engaged and productive, and the bi-weekly Friday lunches naturally grew in size and enthusiasm.

What's Important is that great leaders don't just give to those they lead, they empower those they lead to give authentically of themselves. And in that, everyone receives the benefit.

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

Thanks,

Chuck