



EffortlessHR January 2009 Employer's Advantage Newsletter



FYI – For Your Information - "Engagement, Performance, Retention - Where do Your Employees Fit?"

The economic crisis of 2008/2009 has many companies looking at ways to save money and get through the hard times. What this normally means is that they look to lay off people, cut back benefits (which make good employees look at other opportunities), stop training programs, reduce marketing, and basically “hunker” down.

I feel like I am in a unique position as both a business owner and a human resource generalist to address this economic drama. Let me explain. As a business owner I am facing choices in doing business. Credit is hard to find and cash flow is tight. Clients still are there, however, and they still want and need my services. Sometimes, they just don't know what they need. So, in my role as HR advisor, it is my obligation and the duty of my company, including my star employees, to help them understand what they need.

I don't believe this is the time to “hunker” down. If you do, you won't be prepared when things start moving upward. What you do need to do is spend wisely and use your people efficiently. How, you may be asking, do I do this?

Imagine what would happen if everyone of your employees were in a job that best used all their inherent talents. Imagine your company being empowered with employees who were engaged in their jobs and were interested in helping you succeed. I know that as a business owner, I would love to have that type of workforce and feel blessed that I do have this kind of workforce. I also know, as your human resource advisor how to help you have this type of workforce too.

I believe that in order to get through these rough times and keep the right people actively engaged, performing well, and keeping them on board requires business owners of all sizes to use all the tools at their disposal. This can be done with various tools but the tools I am most familiar with and which I use most effectively are the Profiles International, Inc. assessments. These assessments, along with your company standard hiring and training processes will help you develop a better understanding of the people you employ. This will help you solve many of your most critical and expensive problems.

Reliable information makes HR decisions easier to develop and you can successfully fit people to jobs in which they will excel, retain good employees, become a better manager, improve customer service, and build an effective team.

The foundation of your success is the best use of your assets. If you talk to any management expert, they will tell you that your human capital (your employees) is your most valuable asset. The problem is that only a small percentage of businesses use a pro-active, systematic, analytical process to select, manage, retain, and plan for succession for [employees](#).

I believe if you use the available tools to see results from selection, to coaching and performance management, you will achieve greater productivity and profitability through your human talent.

Imagine the difference in your company. You may need to invest a little to gain a lot. Don't hunker down - look forward and inspire the best in yourself and in your people.

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FROM JIM SIRBASKU'S DESK

A New Year's Plan: "To See Ourselves as Others See Us"

Two hundred years ago, when poet Robert Burns penned the words about seeing ourselves through the eyes of others in his famous poem (To a Louse, 1786), he could not have known that they would apply so fittingly today. Today's economy might be very different if only the leaders running some of our most respected organizations were willing to view themselves through the lenses others use.

In this new year, we must deal with an uncertain national and global economy. It is a good time for us to reassess our priorities and goals. Instead of looking in the mirror and reflecting on whether the hair is combed or the jacket fits well, a wise leader will look beyond the outer image, go beneath the surface. He will evaluate and look inside his true self.

Viewing our deeper selves and honestly recognizing what we see is a difficult task. Getting to the truth will require the help of others, perhaps many others, since some people know only one side of us. Deciding what we are going to do with the information we get back will require help, too, because it is easier to make no change. If you are tempted to think that way, remember: change is the only way to grow.

So, facing two paths – CHANGE and NO CHANGE – let's say we opt for the first one. What will keep us on the straight and narrow path? Here is a plan that can enable change:

- Seek feedback. The only way to know how others view us is to ask. Getting their input can tell us where we are now, which is an important step in getting where we want to go. Honest feedback illuminates our current state and provides a foundation for our betterment.

In addition to seeking out trusted friends and mentors, it is helpful to learn from the people you interact with on a regular basis. How do you treat those who can neither hurt nor harm you, like the clerk at the convenience store? The answer could be revealing.

- Be courageous. Whether or not you believe in making resolutions for the new year is immaterial. If you discover that you behave in ways that make it difficult for others to do their jobs, you have a responsibility to change your behavior. The alteration might be as simple as communicating in person instead of through memos. Or it might be more complex, requiring you to restructure the way you and your management team do business. Remember that embarking on such a course implies to those who take the journey with you that you are serious about change. To request feedback is not easy, but to seek it and then do nothing invites cynicism.
- Do not assume anything about your employees. Know them better than they know themselves. New tools are available to tell you exactly who is working for you – their competencies, their weaknesses and their goals. Do not decide that you can apply the same management style to everyone and get the same results. A multitude of different faces greet you when you walk into the department. They are likely to include four different generations, both genders, and different races and ethnicities. In the global marketplace, you will find variations even within identifiable groups. It is imperative that you learn what skills your employees have, the skills they are capable of acquiring and what it takes to keep them motivated.
- Stay focused. Pledges you make to yourself come with a tempting reality: If you made them, you can also unmake them. The consequences of straying off-course can be daunting, however. One of the biggest is inertia that permeates your organization. If you start something you don't finish, who will keep others focused? Create an accountability system. Make a list and read it at regular

intervals. Or go a step further and give your list to a trusted peer to review with you regularly. Think of your colleague's reminders as a pep talk.

- Recheck midyear. In today's fast-changing world, a goal that's only a few months old can quickly become obsolete. Examining each item on your list after six months will let you know whether you need to stay the course or readjust. Of course, you may have seen some flaws in your accountability plan and made changes accordingly. Remember that the creation of new goals does not have to wait for a new year. You can set goals anytime. Build a new list as necessary depending on what has happened inside and outside the organization.
- Manage frustration. Realists know there are some things they will never change. Smart leaders recognize obstacles and adapt their responses when difficult changes are beyond their control. Keep this in mind whenever you feel caught between harsh choices.
- Know your limits. Sometimes achievers forget that no one is perfect. Just as an artist is never done with his creation, each of us is still a student of life and a creation in progress. This is not permission to remain static, but we don't need to consider ourselves failures, either. Take the middle path: Admit your mistakes and resolve to do better.

As we commit to improve our leadership behavior in the coming year, we must remember that discomfort accompanies important change. But if we do nothing, the return will also be nothing.

Jim Sirbasku, CEO
Profiles International

POP QUIZ

What Kind of Leader Are YOU?

Take our quiz to find out what kind of leader you are. Keep in mind that leadership qualities can change depending on your role, your manager's leadership style, and your employees' differences. Also, you might use a combination of several styles depending on your team's personality, the type of role you have, and the work issues you face. This quiz only suggests how you might respond to important decisions that you might face on a regular basis.

1. You have two days to make a big decision. You:
 - A. Decide without input from peers, subordinates or team members.
 - B. Depend on your veteran employees to make the decision, knowing they will make the right one.
 - C. Quickly convene a meeting with your team members and make your decision based on the prevailing attitude you hear.
 - D. Prefer to leave the decision to a subordinate, then take credit if it's a good one and stay silent if it does not work.
2. What do employees want most from their jobs?
 - A. Feeling valued
 - B. Less stress
 - C. Being part of a team
 - D. Shared vision and values
3. Your team misses a deadline. You:
 - A. Take responsibility, then immediately finish the project yourself.
 - B. Appoint one or two people on the team to get the project finished by a new deadline they set themselves.
 - C. Find out why the team missed the deadline and ask for suggestions about what the next step should be, then set a new deadline.
 - D. Yell at team members, tell the group at large to fix the problem, then stride away.
4. When you have an idea you believe is good for the company, you:
 - A. Float it immediately to higher-ups in your organization who can make it happen.
 - B. Ask highly trusted members of your team to research and test the idea and get back to you

with their thoughts, then forget about it.

C. Present your idea at a team meeting and seek opinions before deciding what to do next.

D. It's not your job to have ideas.

5. When a trusted team member is late for three meetings in a row and is evasive with you about the reason, you:

A. Tell the employee privately that you expect punctuality and insist that the tardiness not occur again.

B. Ask human resources to find out what is going on, but request no report back to you.

C. Seek out the advice of several trusted peers.

D. Confront the employee in a public setting and ask in a loud voice why he or she keeps missing work.

6. Budget concerns mean there will be no raises in the new fiscal year. You:

A. Discuss the issue with no one, but write and distribute an internal memo instructing people with questions to see you.

B. Tell your veteran team members there will be no raises, and let them inform employees the way they see fit.

C. Convene a meeting of team members, break the news and allow questions. Then ask them for ideas on how to tell everyone else and what your organization can offer instead of raises.

D. You never plan raises in your budget anyway, so it doesn't matter.

If you answered mostly A: A is for autocratic leadership. Although you get the job done efficiently, you tend to be a bit inflexible and this could build resentment among employees, giving you results that will prevent your organization's growth (lack of development and high turnover).

Light-bulb moment: Develop some of your trusted subordinates by teaching them what you do so well, and you won't have to work such long hours. You might even enjoy work more!

If you answered mostly B: B is for benign, or laissez-faire leadership. Your style works best when people are old hands at their jobs, and your employees appreciate you for putting your trust in them. However, be sure to designate specifically who is responsible for which projects or they may not get done.

Light-bulb moment: Set firm deadlines and check along the way to make sure you get what you expect. Also, schedule dates for reports to come directly to you in the form (written or oral) that makes sense for you and the team.

If you answered mostly C: C is for collaborative leadership. It's a nice way to make team members feel useful and a good development tool. It also cuts down on cutthroat competition if everyone has an equal say.

Light-bulb moment: If you are a leader who thrives on quick decisions, or if your organization requires them, find a way to compromise between you-think and group-think.

If you answered mostly D: Your employees probably do not trust you. Do you trust yourself?

Light-bulb moment: One of the first things you can do is to lay a strong foundation by treating others the way you wish to be treated. If you want the responsibility of leading, develop your interpersonal skills in leadership training courses.

BOOK REVIEW:

How to Be THE All-Around Top Leader

When the leaders of an organization are the kinds of people everyone wants to follow, so much the better for the growth of the organization. The author of THE 360 DEGREE LEADER believes that even those who are not in the top spot of a company can lead.

Whom should they lead? For starters, their peers, their managers and those in lower positions. Or as author John Maxwell says: across, up and down. Here's a glimpse of his philosophy:

- When leading up: Lead yourself first. Share the boss's vision. Demonstrate that you know the job is not all about power and glamour. Others might turn up their noses at the dirty work, but you tackle it. Even though your job does not offer all of the appearances of being at the top, you can still act like a leader.
- When leading across: Are your actions and your conscience more important to you than cutthroat competition? Then be a friend. Listen to your peers so that they will reciprocate when you need to tell your ideas to someone you trust. Be honest. Make yourself available after hours. Keep your sense of humor honed. When Maxwell advises leaders to put "completing fellow leaders ahead of competing with them," he explains that competition is natural, but a better way to lead peers is to work on balancing competition against reaching team goals.
- When leading down: This familiar leadership lesson is to "catch people doing something right," and we can do it only if we leave our workspaces and walk around. In Maxwell's veteran view, development is a process, not an overnight miracle, and individuals thrive on one-on-one contact.

The author divides his book into sections that examine these areas: the myths associated with leading from the middle; the challenges that people face when they try to be 360-degree leaders; the principles they practice when they lead up, down and across; and their value to their organizations.

Founder of the INJOY Group, Maxwell has developed leaders for 30 years and has often heard people ask how to lead from their roles in an organization. He believes that committed employees can always have an impact, and that developing themselves propels them upward. He has sold more than 12 million copies of his 25 books about the principles of success.

ANNOUNCEMENT:

Are you ready for 2009? EffortlessHR is preparing for 2009 with the launch of three - that's right - 3 new web-products. We are launching Effortless Employee Handbook Builder, Effortless Employee Assessments, and Effortless Business Forms. You will be able to access these new sites through our current www.effortlesshr.com site. Check us out and pass the information on to all those other small businesses looking for assistance.

