

A culture of productivity: giving work meaning

We're paid to do a job. That should be enough to inspire our productivity.

That sounds fair enough, but managers who subscribe to this notion don't really understand what motivates human beings. Their workers will do an adequate job, but adequate won't help a company to compete.

Teresa Amabile of Harvard Business School and independent researcher Steven Kramer write that we all have an 'inner work life'. They describe this as 'the constant flow of emotions, motivations, and perceptions that constitute a person's reactions to the events of the day.' And, they say, senior executives are constantly damaging employees' inner work lives by 'undermin[ing] creativity, productivity and commitment.'

They conclude that the most important ingredient in making employees more productive is that the work is meaningful to the people doing it. This gives workers a sense of ownership, which inspires motivation and commitment, resulting in a powerful performance. Switching project teams, failing to keep people updated, shifting goals and priorities naturally leave subordinates frustrated and feeling useless. They turn off and disengage. Productivity takes a hit.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that only 17% of UK employees consider themselves engaged. It's not unreasonable to assume the rest of UK employees see no meaning in their work. And we wonder why the UK sits at the bottom of G7 countries in productivity?

Senior managers eager to reverse this trend need to clearly communicate to employees how their work contributes to the company's mission. Amabile and Kramer suggest that it starts with your mission statement. It must be clear and set forth what workers are trying to accomplish. Managers need to believe in it, whatever it is, and live it.

According to research by Rob Goffee of London Business School and Consultant Gareth Jones, "people will not follow a leader they feel is inauthentic." If workers see that managers don't really believe in the company's mission, a vacuum forms. Workers see the mission statement – and thus the work they do – as meaningless. Mediocrity sets in.

But when managers believe in and live the company's mission, workers get behind the goals, understanding what they're trying to accomplish.

Productivity is not simply about workers' mindset, however. Steve New of Oxford University's Saïd Business School writes in his white paper *Productivity: There's a Better Way*, "An over-emphasis on the personal characteristics and capabilities of the individual is probably the greatest mistake people make about productivity."

Support from management is crucial in helping workers see meaning in their work. Amabile and Kramer's research shows that companies must "actually support employees' ability to achieve meaningful goals." Give them the tools and training they need to do their jobs. Managers who get behind the company's mission will see this as vital anyway. When managers support them, workers feel what they do *does* matter.

It's worth remembering the old adage: If a job is worth doing, it's worth doing well.

You might also like:

Video: Episode 5: Join the Productivity Revolution

<http://productivitypuzzle.com/article/episode-5-join-the-productivity-revolution/OUurrvg8JNx>

Productivity: There's a better way

<http://productivitypuzzle.com/article/productivity-theres-a-better-way/sg9LXUikIGI>

Improving productivity: It starts with corporate culture

<http://productivitypuzzle.com/article/improving-productivity-it-starts-with-corporate-culture/seRdeK6p8U>

Unipart: What's culture got to do with productivity?

<http://productivitypuzzle.com/article/unipart-whats-culture-got-to-do-with-productivity-/KJchr7iXpD>