

The Realities of the Workplace

Think about the ideal place to work.

It's an environment in which employees and the organization are fully aligned and committed to a common vision or purpose. There is an excitement – an enthusiasm – a shared sense of mission or purpose – and a collective drive to succeed together. Employees feel responsible, accountable for their performance, and empowered to act on behalf of customers and their organizations. There is a sense of a real team spirit, and people help each other toward their common purpose. Everyone knows exactly what is needed and their role in helping to achieve it. It is intense, focused, and driven. And...in the midst of all this intense, purposeful activity with a drive toward success...people are having fun. They enjoy their work. They enjoy working with each other. They enjoy serving their customers. They celebrate their successes together and rapidly analyze and take corrective action when actions do not achieve the desired results. The focus is on solving problems, not blaming others.

Can workplaces like this be found? Absolutely! They are often found in smaller, younger, entrepreneurial environments. They are found where the owner is also the leader. The focus is on creating success for everyone – first for customers, then for the employees, then for the enterprise. Everyone is part of the action.

This environment is not limited to young entrepreneurial organizations. It can be found in organizations of all sizes and shapes, all ages, private, public and non-profit. It is most commonly found in the early days of an enterprise.

Why is this so? Over time, successful organizations grow and it is this success that plants the seeds that potentially create frustration in the workplace. Growth creates the need for more people, more products, more services, and more customers – a good thing. But it also creates increased complexity, which often results in less focus, more diversity of activity, and bureaucracy. As organizations mature, they must continue



to apply the tools that maintain this focus and enthusiasm relentlessly or they will surely drift toward mediocrity.

Consider the following statements by managers in many organizations. Ask yourself whether you have heard (or even said) statements similar to these yourself.

- I know that I should be sitting down with my employees to set their goals and performance measures. But we don't have the time for those kinds of meetings. We're under pressure to get the business done and I just can't take the time for that kind of soft stuff.
- I can tell people what to do, but some of the things I really care about are just too hard to measure. Take teamwork, for example. How do you measure that objectively? Since I can't be sure that all my measures would be absolutely objective, I'm better off not trying – saves me a lot of time and I won't get into trouble with Human Resources.
- I know I should be giving my employees feedback about the areas where I'm not happy with their performance. But I'm afraid of how they might react, and the result could be even more disgruntled and de-motivated employees. So I'll take what I can get and hope that they'll "get it" over time (which of course doesn't happen).
- I have several people who have the same job title and job description. Some are better than others, but it wouldn't be fair to give them different goals. After all, they have the same job so I guess I'm stuck with the "lowest common denominator."
- Our work environment is just too volatile for me to set goals with people. The situation changes weekly – even daily – and no goals would stay in place long enough for them to work.
- I don't see the point of worrying too much about this stuff. Our compensation system is so restrictive that I have almost no room to pay people differently anyway. And if I can't make real differences in

