

17 February 2006

Mapping Hearts and Minds

Employee retention is an art that very few managers practice effectively. One reason for high turnover in organizations is employee dissatisfaction, which is often due to a mismatch between the job and the employee's area of interest. How many bosses make an extra effort to retain their star performer? Do HR managers, whose primary function is to manage people, really understand them? Why is there dissatisfaction after the cumbersome procedure of selecting the near-perfect match for the post? When does the disillusionment set in? It does when an employee realizes that he is not enjoying what he does anymore.

What are life interests?

Life interests involve "the happiness factor". They do not determine what an employee is good at but reflect what kind of work he/she loves. Passion for a certain kind of activity or work is linked with one's personality. Identifying one's life interests and choosing a career accordingly is crucial for job satisfaction.

Why job sculpting?

This is where managers play an important role. They need to identify an employee's life interests and sculpt a job accordingly. Job sculpting is the art of matching people to jobs that allow their life interests to be expressed. Often employees lose awareness of their life interests while fulfilling other people's expectations or picking up an 'easy' career. Any manager who has a keen interest in his fellow employees can help them identify the job they enjoy most.

A few tips for those taking up the challenging task of job sculpting

Observe and probe. Far from discussing life interests, many people are not even aware of them. You need to ask probing questions. Watch for signs of excitement while the employee does a particular assignment. Throw away the conventional yardstick, 'He excels at what he does, so this job is for him'. Excelling at one's work does not necessarily mean he or she is enjoying it.

Get to know. Play the psychologist. In fact, people with the aptitude for job sculpting are born psychologists. Get inside your employee's mind and see what makes it tick. What motivates him to volunteer for certain kinds of job? Declare your willingness to help him identify his life interests.

Make a point. Being employee-oriented is the new mantra. When hiring new personnel, emphasize career development. Show them that their job satisfaction is of prime importance to you.

Consider preferences. During a performance review, ask the employee about his likes and dislikes. For employees who are uncomfortable with oral communication, encourage them to write a few paragraphs on career satisfaction. Ask them to describe their favorite activities on the job.



TenStep Supplemental Paper

Tailor-make the next assignment. Design a job that correlates with your employees' life interests. Try and allocate them the jobs they will enjoy and excel at most. At times, you may find that there are no jobs available that would satisfy an employee's life interests. Even though it would be a painful decision, counsel him to find a job elsewhere that would satisfy him.

Outcome

Job sculpting is a worthwhile method of retaining a talented employee. A company's reputation is built not just by its product and output. It is also based on the energy and loyalty of its people. A satisfied employee is an unadvertised asset!