Human Relationships (NOT Human Resources) Drive Results
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It's All About Execution

Almost 800 CEOs from 40 countries ranked excellence of execution as their top challenge[1]. Finishing out these CEOs' top five challenges were: sustained and steady top line growth, keeping consistent execution of strategy by top management, profit growth, and finding qualified management talent. Clearly, getting things done is at the top of most CEOs to-do lists. What does it take to get things done? What is required for effective execution to occur and to be continued?

Human Relationships are Key

Resources are critical to getting things done. Resources are typically anything that can be used for support or help. They are an available supply of something (e.g., equipment, money, people, etc.) that can be drawn on when needed. Resources (human or otherwise) provide the capacity for getting things done. Resources, however, by themselves, do not get things done. Effective execution requires effective human relationships.

Prior to the 1980's, companies referred to the people side of the business as personnel. In the 80's, the term shifted from personnel to human resources. Since then, terms such as human capital and talent have emerged. All of these terms connote the notion of utility (how can I/we use the resource of people to get things done?). Because these terms (human resources, human capital, talent, etc.) describe people from a resource perspective, they make it easy for us to forget two broader, more important points:

1. Nothing in an organization gets done without people.
2. What gets done (or doesn't get done) in an organization depends on the relationships those people have with one another.

Therefore, human relationships (not human resources) drive results. The sooner businesses get that AND start applying that concept in their daily business, the better off we will all be. Organizations will attract the right kind of applicants and customers. Employees will be more productive and satisfied. Research suggests that companies that focus on improving relationships with their employees and customers are more productive and profitable than those that do not[2].

So, what can an organization do to improve the relationships among their people? Here are seven things you and your company can do to improve relationships at all levels in your organization.

1. **Recruit from the applicant's perspective.** Most companies recruit from the company's perspective. They identify job and organizational requirements and they use that information to drive their recruiting efforts. In the recruiting process, it's all about providing the applicant with information that the COMPANY thinks the applicant needs or wants to know. If companies treated their customers this way, they'd be out of business. Most companies know their customers are (e.g., their demographics, attitudes, personal habits, etc.) and they know what their customers expect or want from them. They then use that information to create promotional materials, products, and services that are designed to attract that particular type of person to their business. Companies need to use that same approach when recruiting. Define your ideal applicant for a particular job (based on what you know about your top employees). Then, use information about the job and the organization to create recruiting materials and processes that will attract and influence that ideal applicant.

2. **Evaluate applicants' people skills during the hiring process.** All too often, companies focus on an applicant's technical skills and knowledge. While these things are important in predicting job performance, equally important is how well the applicant is likely to work well with others. Every employee must work with others. Also, people skills are much more difficult to train than are technical knowledge and skills. For these reasons, you and your organization should pay attention to applicants' people skills during the hiring process. How comfortable, confident, and articulate are they during the interview? How do they describe their relationships with others (e.g., boss, peers, direct reports, customers, etc.) at work? How well do they communicate with others in person, in writing and online? Depending on the position you're filling and the degree to which it requires strong interpersonal skills, you may need to use tools, such as personality and/or

behavioral style assessments, to gather more information about an applicant's people skills.

3. **Treat others as they want to be treated.** As children, we learned the Golden Rule: Treat others as YOU want to be treated. To create and sustain better relationships at work, we need to aspire to an even higher standard - the Platinum Rule[3]. It states that we should treat others as THEY want to be treated. Whether you're trying to persuade your boss to give you a raise, how best to recognize your employees, or how to deal effectively with customer complaints, treating others as THEY want to be treated is critical to building (and maintaining) positive and productive relationships with others.

4. **Consider how employees will react/feel when implementing new programs.** Companies typically consider three factors when creating and rolling out new HR programs. Those factors are cost, convenience, and consistency. Focusing on these factors ensures that the programs will be cost-effective, easy to administer, and fair. These factors, however, do NOT ensure that the programs will be meaningful and motivating to the employee(s). Rarely do companies spend much time considering how employees will feel as a result of a program. HR programs and practices produce maximum benefits to an organization (e.g., increased satisfaction, better morale, and improved retention) only when the program makes employees feel appreciated, valued, or positive about their job and the organization.

5. **Train employees to better communicate with others.** Given the key role that human relationships play in getting things done, organizations need to provide ongoing training to employees that focuses on improving their interpersonal skills. As stated earlier, training interpersonal skills is usually more difficult to do than training for technical knowledge and skills. It is, however, not impossible. Training in such areas as effective communication skills (both speaking and listening), influencing/persuading others, conflict resolution and working as part of a team are critical to creating and maintaining effective relationships at work. This training also serves as a reminder to all employees about the key role that human relationships play in the overall success of the organization.

6. **Evaluate employees on their interpersonal skills.** You can hire applicants with strong people skills. You can also have the best communication and interpersonal skills training in the world. But, if you don't hold people accountable for their performance in this area, your organization's hiring and training is worthless to you and to your organization. Assessing and evaluating employees on their ability to develop and maintain positive relationships with others is critical to the organization's ability to execute most effectively. Also, employees must be provided with specific and ongoing feedback on their "relationship" skills if they are to continue to grow their skills in this area.

7. **Be an authentic leader.** Think about a leader that has inspired you and moved you and others to change. What was that person like? Common answers I've heard to this question are: they understood the business, they understood and cared others, they knew themselves very well, they had a vision and made it come alive, and they shared who they were (their feelings, their thoughts) with others. Other than the first quality (knowing the business), the rest of these qualities are related to building caring, open, and positive relationships with others. I'm reminded of the quote, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." A leader can't change or move people to action until he shares who he is and how he feels with others. Using a combination of coaching, training, and other performance management tools, create ways to help the leaders in your organization share more of who they are and how they feel at work. Your employees, your customers, and your organization will benefit in more and different ways than you can imagine.

Notes and Resources
1. ***CEO Challenge 2007 Top 10 Challenges***, Conference Board.
2. ***Firms of Endearment: How World Class Companies Profit from Passion and Purpose*** by R. Sisodia, D. Wolfe, and J. Sheth
3. ***The Platinum Rule*** by Tony Alessandra, Ph.D.

About the Author
Joan Brannick, PhD, SPHR is President of Brannick HR Connections (BHRC). She is an organizational psychologist that consults, writes, and speaks on recruiting, hiring, engagement, and leadership trends and best practices. She is the co-author of Finding and Keeping Great Employees, a Fortune Magazine "Best Business Book." Her insights have appeared in many business and HR publications including Fortune Magazine, HR Magazine, and the Wall Street Journal. For more information about BHRC's services, call (813) 672-0500 or visit www.BrannickHRConnections.com.