

Developing an Engaged Workforce

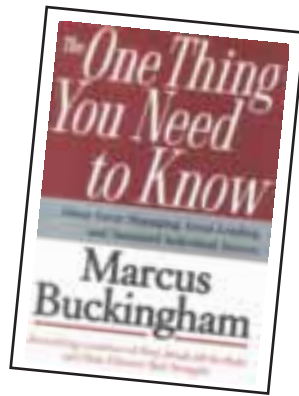
by E. Lander Medlin

Frankly, without good people, it's practically impossible to ensure good facilities. Yet the labor statistics/projections and impending rash of retirements in our profession will dramatically affect our ability to perform the functions and responsibilities required to design, construct, and maintain our campus' educational facilities.

Considered one of the top ten critical facilities management issues, "workforce issues" are a looming concern given the present difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified technical staff; the predicted labor shortage in the skilled trades and building services personnel; the impact of generational differences on worker engagement, productivity, and service delivery; the increased need for workforce training and development; and, the importance of good hiring and selection skills and techniques.

To create an engaged workforce requires an intense focus on three areas fundamental to professional activity: manager, leader, and individual performer. Simply put, an engaged workforce gives you a sustainable, competitive edge. Hence, you become the employer of choice. Why is this so important? The research data suggests that an "engaged" employee is more productive; experiences greater job satisfaction; is less likely to leave the organization (anytime soon); is more creative and innovative; is more efficient and effective; and, positively impacts the bottom line to a greater extent than their counterparts. These employee outcomes translate to orga-

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nizational benefits such as reduced turnover, increased overall employee satisfaction, reduced formal grievance actions, fewer accidents, and positively impacts the financial bottom line.

Therefore, it makes good business sense to be the employer of choice and to focus on improvement in the three areas that comprise an engaged workforce—employees who are competent (hire slowly and train/develop them continuously), focused (they know what is expected of them and how success is measured), and confident (they understand the organization's direction and believe in their collective ability to achieve it).

Marcus Buckingham, author of the book, *The One Thing You Need To Know*, has done a remarkable job outlining the one thing you need to know in each of these three fundamental areas: to be a better manager, to be a better leader, and to sustain individual success. Buckingham uses authoritative data and research to simply and eloquently get to the core—what matters most—to achieve sustained organizational achievement and individual success by focusing on the three roles of manager, leader, and individual performer.

Great Managing

"To get the best performance from your staff you have to be able to select

people effectively, set expectations by clearly defining the outcomes you want, and motivate people by focusing on their strengths and managing around their weaknesses." In essence, you have to act as a catalyst to turn each person's talents, gifts, and strengths into performance. People become an end unto themselves. So the one compelling, core insight great managers understand and do so effectively time and time again is: "Find what is unique in each individual, and capitalize on it." To find that uniqueness you must:

- *Identify their strengths and weaknesses*—maximizing the use of their strengths and minimizing the impact of their weaknesses to challenge them to bring out their best.
- *Trip their triggers*—focusing on the things that uniquely motivate that individual.
- *Understand their learning style*—whether it is that of an analyzer, a doer, or an imitator, you must train in this manner accordingly.

Buckingham identifies five questions that are enormously useful and powerful for great managers to find the strengths in their staff:

- What was the best day at work you've had in the last three months?
- What was your worst day at work in the last three months?
- What was the best relationship with a manager you've ever had?
- What was the best praise or recognition you've ever received?
- When in your career do you think you were learning the most?

Great Leading

Although there are many different styles and approaches of effective leaders, each of them experiences great success in rallying people toward a better future. They possess deep

optimism, self-confidence, a passionate belief in that future, are innately inquisitive, have a driving need to be at the helm, and can see and describe their future clearly and distinctly. Therefore, the one compelling, core insight about great leaders is: "Find out what is universal and capitalize on it". In essence, the great leader is an alchemist turning our fears of change and anxieties of the unknown into confidence about the future. Clarity is considered the antidote to employee fears and anxiety. Therefore, Buckingham points out the need for great leaders to provide clarity around the following points:

- Who do we serve?
- What is our core strength?
- What is our core score?
- What actions can we take today?

Sustained Individual Success

"During the course of your life you will inevitably be exposed to all manner of options, opportunities, and

pressures. The key to sustaining success is to be able to filter all these possibilities and fasten on to those few that will allow you to express the best of yourself." Therefore, the one compelling, core insight about sustained individual success oddly enough is this: "Discover what you don't like doing and stop doing it." In other words, you must discover your own strengths and cultivate them without getting sidetracked, drained, or frustrated by the irritants that derail you from your strengths' path. The longer you put up with aspects of your work you don't like, the less successful you will be and the less effective and productive you will be for your organization.

As Buckingham says, we all yearn for short, clear answers to complex problems. Remember the book, and now movie, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, when Deep Thought (the supercomputer) is asked for the one

Answer to the meaning of life, the universe, and everything. Deep Thought's answer was "forty-two." Certainly this is the ultimate satirical response to anyone trying to find the one Answer. However, the desire for clear answers serves a vital function, one that helps us focus on and take decisive action. Clearly, I have just touched the surface of what Marcus Buckingham's powerful book, *The One Thing You Need To Know*, has to offer in your study of management, leadership, and sustained individual success. Certainly, this book is worthy of your own critical inquiry, discovery, and engagement.

Ben Franklin said, "People should not be treated like sundials in the shade." Our staff deserves our focused attention providing great management, great leadership, and an environment where their best individual contributions will not only be sustained, but can flourish. 🏢



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