MAKING WORK REWARDING

It is striking that almost all top performing companies attribute their performance to the performance of their people.

Turn this around a bit and the message gets even clearer. Without top performers, committed to the organisation and its objectives you just won't achieve the kind of top level results that you should be achieving.

It should come as no surprise that the degree to which peoples' contributions are acknowledged, valued and rewarded links directly to their performance and commitment. At the same time as senior leadership and HR practitioners strive to align people strategies to organizational imperatives the following key questions must also be asked:

- What are we doing to ensure that all employees know how their jobs contribute to the company's success?
- Are we making full use of effective processes to attract, retain and grow top performers and maximize their contributions?
- What is the difference in the total remuneration of low-achieving and high-achieving employees – especially in the same job grades?

The work of McClelland (an early researcher in the fields of human motivation and competency assessment) gives further insight into these questions. He describes a universal motivational drive which he calls the need for achievement. This need expresses itself through:

- A tendency to take reasonable **risks**
- The desire to take personal **responsibility for results**
- The need for **feedback** in order to make "course corrections"
- An ongoing concern for personal **development** and **improvement**
- A genuine interest in **efficiency** and **innovation** – how to do things better, faster, cheaper and differently

McClelland discovered that a strong desire to satisfy the need for achievement was a reliable predictor of top performance. He also discovered that as the achievement drive was further developed and strengthened, performance improved commensurately – for individuals, teams, departments and organizations.

So now the key question becomes: What are we doing, in our organisations, to make sure this is happening? More specifically, as we work to recruit and develop the right people to strengthen our talent pool, how are we rewarding and retaining our most important asset?

Many researchers have suggested many approaches. Based on the research, the following practical guidelines directly influence commitment and motivation:

- Display genuine interest in the work that people contribute; let them know they are valued.
- Listen carefully to what people have to say; get them to expand on their ideas, arguments, or suggestions. Create a climate of open communication and affirm their sense of self-worth.

- Identify each person's unique added value, and then reinforce this contribution by acknowledging their strengths and the degree to which they are making a positive difference.
- Recognise accomplishments by encouraging employees to take on new, challenging assignments. By encouraging personal growth, you demonstrate confidence in their ability to contribute even more.
- Trust people. Provide "room to move" by increasing their levels of responsibility and placing them in important decision-making roles.
- Pay employees well for their contributions. Ensure there is a meaningful difference between the rewards top performers receive as compared to their average counterparts. Financial rewards need to be tied directly to levels of performance and be felt (by employees) to be fair and equitable.

There is no doubt that employees who are committed, valued and achievement-focused boost organisational performance. They create the most shareholder value, either directly or through their ability to inspire and engage others; and organizations should invest in them accordingly. By discovering people's aspirations, accelerating their development, providing timely, candid and helpful performance feedback and ensuring that rewards match the level of contribution, you send a clear message to talent across the organization and make work rewarding.

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