Clarity of Direction Prevents Defection

Ever wondered how you stop top talent walking when the going gets tough?

Unless you capture the hearts and minds of people, the grass for some is always going to be greener on the other side. How do you stop talent from walking? According to columnist Stefan Stern in the Financial Times, there are some basic points; all of which are, to his phrase, ‘no-brainers’:

- Provide clarity of strategic direction and pace. You need to know where you’re heading and have confidence that your leader is going to get you there.
- Instil trust and confidence in your most focussed employees. They most demand and expect clarity of direction.
- Address fundamental concerns. Everyone needs to know what is expected of them, the behaviours they should be exhibiting, the objectives they need to achieve.
- Put people in roles suited to their skills and ambitions. Build on their strengths and motivations.
- Provide the tools for people to do their jobs. Clarity of direction is meaningless unless people have the resources – including the time, the space and the support – to succeed.

- Act quickly. The longer you wait, the more you create a vacuum, leaving your employees to worry and draw their own conclusions.
- Continue investing in R&D. Innovation is even more important in a downturn. Hay Group consultant Will Werhane adds his comments in their Leader newsletter: “While people are looking for some direction, they do not necessarily want all the answers. A lot of leaders tend to hesitate – trying to find the answers to everything. Involving the workforce and being open and honest in communications is more important than answers.”
- When employees feel that their concerns are being addressed, that their ideas are listened to and that they are respected, their loyalty is more assured. By failing to engage effectively, organisations lose the discretionary effort that could make all the difference in these harder times.
- Discretionary effort is the work over and above what employees are expected of them, the space and the support – to succeed.

These large group participation processes can involve the whole organisation in fast and meaningful dialogue on the strategic direction and key focus areas. By involving everyone, leaders act quickly and operate in an open and honest way that builds trust and commitment. And they are remarkably cost effective as well! A massive impact can be gained from just a half day event on strategy and forward thinking.

New Directions facilitates meetings such as described in the article. To find out more about engaging employees and the use of large group processes, call us.

Hay Group Leader Issue 8 July 2008
Stefan Stern FT.com January 31 2008

Teams within Teams

Creating smaller teams within projects is an effective way to split and complete complex tasks. But is there a best way to divide a project team into smaller groups?

A recent study at the Sloan School of management used 62 teams of six undergraduates. Each team was then broken down into subgroups of different sizes with members on different campuses (3+3, 2+3+1, or 5+1). The study then examined the effects of different subgroup sizes and configurations on team performance. The researchers then tasked each team with writing a collaborative report on a broad academic topic.

They found that teams with subgroups of unequal sizes exhibited higher levels of conflict, had greater problems with team identity, and were less coordinated than teams with subgroups of equal size.

The exception was that isolated team members – e.g. those who worked alone from home – worked well with geographically dispersed subgroups. They tended to be more efficient, had no issues of ownership, and helped coordinate the efforts of other subgroups.

The answer therefore seems to be that you should try to breakdown work into packages that can be given to sub-groups of similar size. Or work with individual contributors.

Projects@Work June 2008
Friends and Enemies Within: The Roles of Subgroups in Geographically Dispersed Teams, MIT Sloan School of Management
**Are you going forward? Then stop!**

Lucy Kellaway has been waging a campaign against office jargon and published 50 of the worst (worldwide) examples (see link below for the full list). Some of my favourites:

“Let’s touch base about that offline”
**Gemna, Wolverhampton, England**

“Pre-plan - there is no such thing. Either you plan or you don’t.”
**Malcolm, Houston, USA**

“Apparently, what we’re doing in our call centre at the moment is sprinkling our magic along the way – It’s a call centre, not Hogwarts.”
**Caroline, Ayrshire, Scotland**

“We’ve got our fingers down the throat of the organisation of that nodule.”
**Theo, Kettering, England**

“I once had a boss who said, ‘You can’t have your cake and eat it, so you have to step up to the plate and face the music.’”
**Tim, Durban, RSA**

“We used to have daily paradigm shifts, now we have stakeholders who must come to the party or be left out.”
**Barry, Cape Town, RSA**

“The head of HR told us that she was being cascading down new information to staff. What she meant was she was sending a memo. And the chief executive persisted on referring to the company as a really cool train set.”
**Andrew, London, England**

“This year’s favourite word seems to be granularity, meaning detail. As in ‘down to that level of granularity.’”
**Chris, Venezuela**

“My university department sent this notice out to campus customers: Thank you for your note. We are assessing and mitigating immediate impacts, and developing a high-level overview to help frame the conversation with our customers and key stakeholders. We intend to start that process within the week. In the meantime, please continue to raise specific concerns or questions about projects with my office via the Transition Support Center...”
**Charles, Washington, USA**

“When a stock market is down why must we be told it is in negative territory?”
**Phil, Mexico**

“Need to get all my ducks in a row now - before the five-year-olds wake up.”
**Mark, Bridgend, Wales**

**Irving Fields – an inspirational story**

Irving Fields is 92 years old. He plays piano at Nino’s restaurant in New York. That’s not the inspiration! When he was 91, he has his hip replaced. In the hospital his nurse told him to be careful walking up and down stairs making him repeat the phrase, ”up-left, down-right” over and over again.

Irving started dreaming about ”up-left, down-right.” One morning he awoke and he had turned the phrase into a song which he couldn’t get out of his head.

When he got home a friend suggested that Irving start a jingle company, and advertise his services on YouTube. Irving didn’t know about the YouTube or the web. He didn’t even have a computer. But he got excited and turned the original into a song for YouTube that’s had over 750,000 hits. Here’s the link:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxkuYeER11c

Thanks to Judith Glaser benchmarkcommunicationsinc.com

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