

Less Management, More Leadership: Restoring Optimal Balance

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We forget sometimes that management does not emanate from nature. It's not like a tree or a river. It's like a television or a bicycle. It's something that humans invented.

— Daniel Pink,

The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us

IN LIGHT OF STUDIES SHOWING THE NEGATIVE impact of employee disengagement, a growing number of executives and HR professionals are prioritizing engagement. In fact, this issue so preoccupies the business community that the Canadian Conference Board has made it the central topic of the Toronto HR Summit in September entitled *Engagement Strategies for Uncertain Times*.

As we address the daunting how-to questions and acknowledge the imperative of increasing engagement, some misunderstandings often linger about what it consists of exactly. The U.S. Conference Board defines it as: “a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that employees have for their job, organization, manager or co-workers.” This heightened connection is essentially what causes employees to exert additional discretionary effort at work. In short, they do *more*; hence the company achieves *more* results.

Leadership Key to Employee Involvement

Among wise thinkers and consultants on matters of engagement, leadership and management, John P. Kotter pointed out the importance of leadership as a key factor in employee involvement and business outcomes. In “What Leaders Really Do”, first published in the *Harvard Business Review*, Kotter asserts that management and leadership are currently out of balance in many organizations. Simply put, he says that “corporations today are over-managed and under led”. Yet, an optimal

balance of both of these two complementary systems of action is necessary for business success.

One reason for this imbalance is the fact that the boundaries of management and leadership roles tend to get blurred; lack of clarity prevails about the distinct skills and purposes of these roles.

Kotter reminds us of three contrasting differences:

- management is about budgeting according to plans whereas leadership is about setting a direction;
- management involves and organizes staff whereas leadership is about aligning people; and
- management is busy taking charge, controlling and solving problems, while leadership provides the vision and the motivation to achieve it.

Managing Everything Leading Nowhere

Given the pressures and complexities of our fast-paced business landscape, we can get caught up in ‘managing’ mode, removing obstacles, solving problems, and lose our leadership perspective; we lose sight of the inspiring goals on our personal and organizational horizons. We try to manage everything.

Consider how the word *managing* itself has woven its way into our daily lives. Whether at work or in life, we are expected to manage our time, our stress, our priorities, our tasks, our responsibilities, and so on. No one wants to be perceived as unable to *manage*, so we strive to do that very well, lest we experience degrees of embarrassment or even shame.

On the flip side, unless in a formal leadership position, how often are we expected to *lead* in our personal and work life? How often we do has a far larger impact than reducing the stress of perpetually trying to manage. When we embrace leadership

qualities, we are more likely to sustain our efforts and enthusiasm, maintain larger perspectives and vision, and to model persistence and greatness while inspiring others.

Vision: A River Runs Through it

In my experience as a professional business coach, vision is crucial to generating momentum and turning goals into realities; managing problems and obstacles does not suffice. Just like the current in a river provides movement and direction, a well-articulated and sustained vision infuses the organization with a stamina that helps to spark discretionary effort among employees.

Going further with this analogy, a river without a current has no flow and runs the risk of growing stagnant; weeds take hold; banks crumble; stones block the riverbed. Vision is the current which brings the river to life as a metaphor, and in reality translates into the theme of this issue, “The Economy of Engagement”.

A strong current does more than keep the river flowing; it flows outward, forging new fields, gaining momentum and inspiring greater yields.

The Uncommon Gains of Leadership Culture

As Kotter pointed out, in a culture of leadership, everyone is encouraged to rise up to that level of implied excellence which is expected of leaders. Astonishing numbers result from studies he quotes indicating that firms with cultures emphasizing leadership at all levels outperformed those that did not by a huge margin. Over an 11-year period, revenue increased 682 per cent for leadership-enabled enterprises, compared to 166 per cent for those who weren't. The net income increased compared 756:1.

Here are three practical strategies to help instil an engaging culture of

leadership and to re-balance the dynamics of management and leadership:

1. Value inspiration as the necessary current to flow towards better business results.

Augmenting the flow of inspiration can be achieved in various innovative ways in the workplace. For example, creating periodic campaigns that bring to life the specific values and the mission of the company would encourage transparency and support everyone to better align with such values. Inspirational messages, anecdotes and success stories can also contribute to feeding the leadership spirit being infused in the workplace culture. Inspiration tends to have a ripple effect which is a contagiousness antidote to a kind of cynicism that may spread in a company when employees are at risk of becoming disengaged.

2. Involve more people in decision-making.

Workplace surveys repeatedly reveal that a majority of employees want their company to be more collaborative so that they can be given the opportunity to contribute to decision-making. By setting up processes for management to listen and for employees to have a voice, involvement is further enriched at all levels. Employees tend to better sustain their efforts when management treats employees as an important part of the organization. Programs that acknowledge and reward cost or time saving solutions can also be effective in encouraging employees to contribute their invaluable ideas.

3. Create more communication and connections between employees, managers and leaders.

In the *2008 Global Workforce Study* by Towers Perrin, employees stated that, one factor that helps them to feel engaged at work is to know that senior management is sincerely interested in their well-being and success. What if an e-newsletter could feature some of the personal and professional achievements of employees? This could include an employee's outstanding participation in a fundraising campaign, running a marathon, reaching a new professional development milestone, winning an award for a photo contest, etc.

Providing opportunities for people

to share news about their aspirations, personal talents and achievements helps them feel acknowledged and it inspires others as well. More communication could also ensure that everyone's role is clearly defined to avoid energy-dispersing confusion and the erosion of boundaries between roles, including managers and leaders. When a better rapport is established across the levels of the company, a sense of belonging is fostered along with engagement.

Beyond the Bridge: The Profits of Balance

When a company bridges the common gaps to reach an optimal balance of management and leadership, its potential profits are abundantly enlarged - as is the vista afforded by the journey. On that bridge we have a new sense of balance, a full measure of the river and an expanded perspective: one that rewards a stronger commitment to excellence and which draws and engages the leader within everyone. **P**

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