

Humanising the Workplace for Productivity. — The New Business Imperative

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There is a belief in some quarters that human values have no place in today's cut throat competition in business. The statistics indicate quite a contrary trend, says the author. The tendency to oversell a job can be harmful to the interests of the organisation in the long run. The author also warns against making false promises while recruiting people for the organisation. Appraisal system, says the author, can never be perfect, thus the importance of using discretion while appraising. Paying compliments where they are due can produce wonderful results. Compensation is a tricky question, but it should be at least competitive, says the author. The importance of "human dignity at work place" is the first lesson taught in the organisation behaviour, yet the so called professional managers have forgotten this basic lesson, laments the author.

Looking at the title of this article, an acquaintance of mine scoffed and said in a very skeptical manner that organizations exist for exploiting people for maximum results and there is really no place for human values in modern day competitive organizations which have to survive and grow in the cut throat world of business. On the other hand, there are official and unofficial statistics that confirm that trend is actually in the opposite direction. One consultant has claimed that the market for training in Human Resources in India is about Rs. 2,500 crores in India at present and is likely to grow to about Rs. 5,000 crores in the next few years. There is a mushrooming of consultants and behaviorists who help companies to search for and execute appropriate Organization Development Inputs. Today, more than ever, CEO's are spouting value based Human philosophy. Over the dinner table the other day, one such CEO came out and claimed that he felt uncomfortable when his subordinates call him "Sir" and that he would really like to treat them all like members of a large organizational family.

SELECTION - Be realistic in advertising your job. Don't oversell. Even when you are recruiting through a placement consultant, make sure that he isn't overselling the job to potential prospects. Where giving statistical information about the company, be truthful about the picture that you are presenting. For example, there was this company that said in their recruitment advertisement that they had grown 900% in five years since their inception without really clarifying whether that statistic related to turnover, to size

of market share or to the number of employees it had. In real terms it could also mean that in the first year of operations, the company did Rs. 1 crore turnover, and five years later today it was a Rs. 9 crore turnover company, which is no big deal. All this without mentioning profitability! You really don't want to attract the kind of person that gets taken in by that kind of data. On the other hand, if you did attract the kind that you wanted in the first place, he is in the rude shock when he walks into the organization and finds that things are different from what was told to him at the time of selection. Not only will it increase the chances of him leaving the organization very soon, but it will also diminish whatever good employment image that you may have created in the first place, not counting the negative effects on the morale and goodwill within the company. Also never make promises at the time of negotiations, which you may or may not be able to keep. For example, a Personnel Manager was given a job at the factory, with a promise that within two years, he would be shifted back to the Corporate office. Two years later, his boss who had made the promise, had retired, and the new incumbent feigned total ignorance of the commitment. The result — the company lost an excellent manager, and also lost a great deal of face.

Treat potential prospects with courtesy and respect. Make sure that you don't keep interview candidates waiting too long at the Reception Room. Be prompt in seeing them. In case there is a last minute exigency and a few minutes delay is unavoidable, do go out to the reception and explain to him/her personally that there will be a

slight delay, offer some company literature or a magazine to read in the meantime, and do have a cup of tea or coffee sent, to show that you care for his well-being. Do respond to all interview rejects with a polite regret letter. It may sometimes seem like too much work to reply to each and every applicant, but once *you have called* a person for an interview, the ball is in your court, and a response is a must.

Once a degree of trust and expertise has been built up, let go of some of your power and delegate. Such delegation will light a spark of motivation in the person and raise him to higher levels of contribution.

INDUCTION - Welcome the newcomer with open arms. Make his first day unforgettable. Remember how you felt on your first day at the office. Show him the way around, introduce him to all the people that would be interacting with him. Work out a detailed induction programme for him that will not only familiarize him with the operational aspects of the business, but also enable him to absorb and internalize the organization culture. Be patient with him. Allow him time to settle down at his own pace.

APPRAISING - There is yet no perfect appraisal system designed in any organization. However, many companies come pretty near perfect in their design considering their own unique culture. Acknowledging the fact that there may be some weaknesses in the system in appraising others, go for what really counts in the person and focus on the totality of the situation and the person rather than merely on goal accomplishment. In your feedback session with him, be sensitive to the unique psychological configuration of the person, rather than behave like a steamroller forcing your opinions and actions down his throat. In giving adverse feedback, do focus on what went wrong instead of who is wrong or even why he is wrong. Be straightforward and forthright in your opinions, give critical incidents where the person has failed to measure up and don't beat around the bush trying to tell him in a roundabout way when his actions did not match up to the situation. If you have a hidden agenda for the feedback session, you will only send out mixed signals to the person and confuse the issue further. Outline corrective actions clearly and in a

supportive manner rather than in a threatening way, as if issuing a warning signal which sends the message "Shape up or Ship out" or even "Dig your own grave". Provide for him enough freedom to voice his apprehensions, anxieties as well as aspirations. Give praise where a good job has been done. Compliment him on the way he handled certain assignments. It is amazing, the kind of mountains you can move with the use of praise.

COMPENSATION - A very tricky question is: How much is the job really worth? No matter how much you offer your people, you will always find that there is some other company out there that is willing to offer the same person a little more. What really must be kept in mind is that salary is meant to provide for a certain kind of life-style. Do consider the tax angle while making a job proposition and offer a reasonable increase over the incumbent's present salary levels (net of tax). Penny-pinching at this stage will only leave a bad taste in the mouth of the person and though he may accept a slightly lower salary, he will certainly start off on the wrong foot. On an organizational level, be sure that your company's salaries are competitive, although you may not be the highest paymaster in your industry group. Provide generously for benefits like leave and medical allowances. An employee who has just availed of his annual leave is a more productive person than a person who has been working non-stop for the whole year. Benefits like sabbaticals also help retain employees and serve to rejuvenate the work enthusiasm of individuals.

ORGANIZATION CULTURE - One of the first lessons taught in the Organization Behavior class at management schools is that ... "Human dignity at the work place must be maintained". Yet, it is a pity, how the so called professional managers have forgotten the basics. It is very common to hear Personnel Managers belittling and sniggering about one or the other employee, sometimes even openly taunting and also indulging in public reprimanding of employees. Remember, insults have a way of getting back at you, and such behavior will ultimately eat away the very fabric of the organization culture. Instead, build an organization culture that is strong and vibrant — a workplace where "Work is fun" and "Stress is fabulous not fatal". Give

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your people a sense of purpose in their coming to work in the morning. Focus toward the positive mental health of your employees for maximum results.

ROLE OF THE LEADER - Nurture your people, allow for human error within limits, don't push them into actions that they may be unprepared for; instead, enhance their strengths through empowerment, training and technology. Provide for role clarity, set attainable goals, don't stretch the limits. Praise and recognize freely and be impersonal in your criticism. Allow for participa-

tion and provide opportunities for self-expression. Foster a positive attitude in your subordinate. Once a degree of trust and expertise has been built up, let go of some of your power and delegate. Such delegation will light a spark of motivation in the person and raise him to higher levels of contribution with the result that these people will be instrumental in making your dreams come true. □

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