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CEO Alert: Why Managers Can't Increase Productivity with Current Methods — And What to Do about It

[By Terri Levine]

CEOs are in the hot seat. According to a report in the *Financial Times*, in recent years the trend has been that the average length of stay in the CEO position is just three years, with some being given “the boot” after just 18 months and one being let go after just 12 weeks. This is far less time than the typical CEO had some 15 years ago. The most common reason given for this high turnover is their collective performance, with a smaller percentage leaving due to retirement. We could also say that a CEO is only as good as his management team.

Many managers reach their positions through natural progression up the corporate ladder. They get where they are on the strength of their ability. The thing to remember is that most of them have never had any training in managing people. They may be the best at what they do, but if they can't get the best out of their people, productivity will suffer, as will profitability.

Studies have proven that the morale of a company's workforce is directly linked to profitability. Low morale — low profits. High morale — high profits. Workers who are happy in their jobs and with their employers perform better, resulting in higher and improved productivity and profitability. And surveys performed by Gallup have shown that the old-fashioned methods of offering financial incentives, company cars, etc. do not produce long-term benefits.

Corporations have spent decades trying to manage people, only to find that more people were quitting, more employees were unhappy, productivity and profits were down, and morale was down the drain. Managing people and people's behaviors had not resulted in change. Clearly, a new model was needed.

Out of the contrast, a coaching model, focused on employee morale, developed. And it is this model of “management”

that is seeing companies reach new and higher levels of success. This new model was created from the best practices in organizational development, human resources, and leadership methods. It recognizes that morale is the key to any company's productivity and profitability, and it focuses on a coaching method that improves the bottom line and supports a higher quality of work life.

As a CEO, you need to start with your management team and ensure that it filters down through the ranks. Here are a few tips from my book *Stop Managing, Start Coaching*:

Managers, like all employees, are starving for the assurance that their employer and their co-workers respect them. They do not achieve their potential if their senior management is constantly looking over their shoulders or micromanaging them. So we need to stop “managing” — stop pushing, threatening, looking over shoulders, or checking up on them in a way that does not make them feel good about themselves or the work they perform. There are better ways to keep informed and better ways to achieve the desired results from your team.

With all the problems in the world — terrorism, the economy, fear of job loss, etc.— you need to encourage a focus on things that make your

managers feel good. People do prefer to focus on things that make them feel good, but many simply don't know how. They've never been taught. Your job, as CEO, is to instill a positive and happy focus in every employee— don't let them focus on what they fear is happening or might be going to happen.

Create a mission and a vision that evolves from the participation of every employee and is not something that is dictated by those at the top (which creates an “us vs. them” feeling). The people doing the work also create the dollars— collectively, you all represent the company, which is why a collective process of visioning is the key.

Honesty — Allow each person, from the CEO down, to speak their truth without fear of ridicule, judgment, or reprisals. Today's employees are less trusting, having witnessed fraud and corporate scandals. Remove the red tape and “politics,” and you will decrease the fear of speaking up, and this way, you can get to hear their ideas. Many a new or improved product, or way of doing something, has sprung from the employee think tank, earning and saving companies millions. You don't have to be a Harvard graduate to have a good idea!

Hold “What's Right” Meetings — Meet regularly with employees in a group meeting. There is no agenda here other than to



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share what is going well, what people are noticing that is working right, and what people are feeling good about, and then to share those items that are not yet correct. This process leads to the exchange of ideas about how to make things work better. This is also a perfect opportunity for the CEO to publicly acknowledge the success of a manager and his department. When you say, "George, that was a great idea you implemented. I congratulate you and your entire department for a wonderful success. Great job, everyone!" George and his "team" will go back to work looking for more ways to earn your public praise. You have just made them all feel great about themselves and made them feel their efforts are noticed, appreciated, and worthwhile.

Create Transformation Teams — The aim is to have every single employee offer input. The purpose of the teams is to communicate and have an idea exchange for creating a better work environment. I've seen immense benefits and improvements arise by such team brainstorming sessions, from creating more products and services to new programs, systems, and effective cost-saving ideas.

Focus your managers' attention on creating what they do want, rather than what they don't want. For example, the kind of community they want, the work experience they want, the way they want to feel at work, and the actions they will take each day to support their co-workers and the company. If employees spend their workdays thinking their jobs are stressful, no one appreciates them, and a myriad other energy-draining thoughts, they'll create more of those experiences. If we encourage employees to spend their day thinking about more of what they do want and what feels good and what makes them happy, then that is the reality they will create.

Celebration — Encourage your managers and employees to notice when other people are doing things well and acknowledge them. "Thanks for getting that to me before the meeting." "That was great work!" People are bombarded by commercialized messages telling them their parenting skills are lacking, their dietary habits are appalling, they don't know how to dress, and so on. Then there are the family messages about how they don't earn enough, or they don't spend enough time with their family. Some people feel they can't do anything right. Make your managers and employees feel they are doing lots of things right at work, and they will do more and more of these right things. Praise costs nothing, but its effect on employee morale is priceless!

Morale Check — Managers need to view their roles as employee check-up specialists, taking away obstacles and challenges, hearing what employee perspectives are, taking their pulse on how they are feeling, what they want, and what would give them a feeling of well-being at work. Then the manager needs to spend time acknowledging progress, looking for greatness, and focusing on increasing buy-in.

Employee Evaluations — Most people dread the evaluation process. First, evaluations sound like you are deciding how worthy a person is, and for others it's simply a fault-finding mission. We reframe the evaluation process to become "WOW to YOU" sessions. A WOW to YOU is a way to celebrate the great strengths *and* the lesser strengths you see in the employee. With this new method, you are looking all the time to find what the manager is doing well, what would be ideal, what isn't a great strength yet, and what resources are needed to support the manager and enhance his or her strengths.

Community — Develop a sense of community within the company. Start with the work

environment. What is great about it? What would help all your employees to enjoy the workplace more? Is it office space, music, plants, better lighting, parking? Do they want childcare on site, flextime, job sharing? Brainstorm ways that bring fun, respect, and acknowledgment back into the workplace and create an environment where people enjoy coming to work.

Skinny Meetings — Managers often complain of too many meetings that take up too much time. They tune out instead of tuning in. It's easy to pare down meetings if you view a meeting as a time to meet for inspired action. As leader of your management meetings, keep people on track, be upbeat and positive, and acknowledge all successes. Lengthy discussions with one person can be continued later at a private meeting. Ask everyone to contribute ideas and participate — do not judge what is offered. Ensure that everyone leaves the meeting with at least one inspired action and returns to their departments feeling good about themselves and the work they do.

As CEO you no longer tell everyone what to do — you encourage their participation in the process of what is being done in the best interests of the company. Develop a safe and happy environment for them to work in, offer positive feedback, and keep an open-door policy. Don't just ask your managers to do a job without ensuring that they have the skills and tools necessary for doing it. If you are new to the position, you need your management team to buy into you before they will buy into your ideas and vision. Leadership qualities can be learned. And for the fastest results, consider hiring a professional coach to work with you and your management team.

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