

Negative Culture Saps Productivity

By Barbara Bartlein | Tuesday, July 14, 2009

Too many employees dislike their jobs and view them as “have to” instead of “get to,” according to Roxanne Emmerich in her new book, *Thank God It's Monday: How to Create a Workplace You and Your Customers Love*. This creates a negative culture of excuses, whining, gossiping and complaining with little focus on making the customer successful. And now, with all the layoffs, it seems those “left behind” are stressed and so fearful with twice the work and half the friends they have lost their ability to get results.

According to Emmerich:

- Over 91% of people spend a large portion of their day frustrated by their coworker's dysfunctional behaviors and regularly think about quitting their jobs.
- Managers waste 37% or more of their day dealing with dysfunctional and unproductive behavior.
- More than two thirds of the workplace is considered to be “disengaged” according to polls by Gallup.
- One dollar out of every three payroll dollars is lost due to disengaged employees.

Many organizations attempt to address negativity in the workplace, but end up putting Band-Aids on the problem—quality initiatives, process improvements, teambuilding—all which can be good. But if they are put on top of a culture of excuses and passive aggressive behavior, they will not be successful.

Organizations can improve their cultures by openly addressing negativity and making it clear what types of behaviors are expected. Rather than pushing dissent underground, it is much more positive to flush it out and deal with issues directly. The institutional pathology of avoiding hard discussions and decisions must be overcome to make progress towards a positive culture.

Thank God It's Monday also suggests that employees:

- Need to realize that they are in charge of the solutions. Employees must step up and confront gossips by saying, “sounds like you need to go to that employee directly. I don't want to be a part of any gossip.” Each individual needs to take the initiative instead of passively waiting for things to change.
- Can't listen to excuses. This only reinforces a “can't” attitude instead of a “can do” approach. Excuses lead to mediocrity and this becomes contagious. Don't lower your standards to the lowest common denominator. If someone is giving out excuses, simply say, “Thanks for sharing why you can't... but how CAN you? I expect you to make it happen.”

- Confront the whiners and complainers. If someone is whining, ask them to please list three solutions and make a top recommendation and then put them in charge of implementation. When I was VP of a large hospital system, my motto always was, "If someone complains about the Holiday Party, they are automatically in charge of it for next year."
- Don't play the victim. The helpless approach only promotes a powerless culture. Victimhood keeps us stuck, according to Emmerich, and isn't good for the individual or the organization. We all have to take responsibility for our decisions and actions. And don't reinforce the victims around you with comments like, "How DO you take it?"
- Don't wait on the sidelines. Too many people are so anxious about the recession and the economy that they are frozen waiting for the worst. Emmerich suggest that it is more productive to work at shifting the workplace culture. List the results you want each week as a team and celebrate when they are achieved. Customers like results and teams that can deliver them.

Now is the time to get focused on making your customers successful. Customer satisfaction is worthless and doesn't cut it during times like this. Instead, start adding massive value and make sure you don't sign up for the recession. This economy can be an opportunity for your organization to pull ahead while others are standing still.