

The Fundamentals: Solving The Problem Of A Stagnating Workforce

Written by Enrique Mora, Consultant
Friday, 23 March 2012 10:38



Digging out from the skilled-crafts hole will require new intellectual muscle and zeal. This industrial-management expert reminds us that an organization may be able to find plenty of both deep within its pool of existing workers.

Stagnation leads to frustration and worse. We've all seen them: people who stay in the same (usually entry-level) job for many years, are good associates and loyal. In the long run, though, these individuals may grow apathetic because they "don't get opportunities" for promotion to more important positions in the enterprise. Even if they don't show it, they may come to resent their companies, their supervisors or managers and their peers. Rarely, are they aware that their obstacles to promotions can only be removed by their own efforts.

These valuable employees find themselves stagnated in positions that provide minimal satisfaction. The common denominator here is typically a combination of education and training—or, *more specifically, the lack of education and training*. This is especially true for those who don't have a good command of English or whose level of education is limited. Take Hispanics, for example: One of the main barriers Hispanics confront in the United States comes via Spanish-language newspapers, TV and radio stations. This media caters to the Hispanic community and sends the wrong message:

"You don't need to learn English."

This, in turn, causes many Hispanics to continue behaving at a conformity level and not adapting to a non-Hispanic culture. Consequently, they remain behind in opportunities to progress.

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Regardless of their nationalities, people with “limited progress opportunities” have something else in common: Their jobs typically absorb most of their time, so their chances for ongoing professional development (i.e., taking advantage of additional job-related education and training) are slim to none. Employers, whether they realize it or not, are greatly affected by this situation. The hiring of a person is already a cost of operation for the business. Given the daily workload, it would seem normal for some people to remain in entry levels forever. Unfortunately, while they end up doing their jobs well, without a path to job growth within an organization, such employees—*especially those who have been able to acquire additional training and skills*—may look to avail themselves of external options, thus putting their existing employers in vulnerable positions. This doesn’t have to be the case.

Motivating by talent improvement

Businesses need to develop a new feeling of open opportunity in their operations. This results in a win-win situation for both employers and associates. By focusing on multiple opportunities for learning business activities, organizations can develop a more versatile workforce. Examples of how companies can develop open opportunities for their employees include:

- Onsite English-language classes for employees
- Onsite Spanish- or other-language classes for supervisors and managers
- Partnerships with local technical colleges
- Incentives to complete studies related to the company’s operations

Incentives can include:

- Paid tuition after successful completion of classes and/or certifications
- Work-time concessions to attend classes
- Opportunity for promotions as new skills and expertise are reached

Gallup has surveyed and measured the level of engagement of the associates at hundreds of different organizations. Its conclusions:

“Organizations that start by investing in an individual’s natural talent—and then add the pertinent knowledge and skills

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—experience a much greater return on every hour and dollar they spend developing people.”

The process for capturing such benefits is simple:

1. Attract people by the reputation of the organization.
2. Select the best candidates.
3. Continuously invest in their development.
4. Engage them in the goals and policies of the organization.
5. Optimize their skills.

This process sends the right message to the associate: “We are focusing on your strengths and will help you enhance them.” The resulting loyalty that this message and actions generate will keep an organization’s best associates focused on the development of the business and themselves. They will be more likely to spend their careers with this type of company (60.3%) than the average employee (21.4%). That reflects a trifold increase in the ROI of recruitment, training and development efforts.

The global marketplace is extremely volatile these days. Demand for products and services can change at any time, and companies must be prepared with the type of workforce (i.e., a versatile one) to strengthen workstations or even administrative positions as needed. Organizations may also need to consolidate positions that no longer require full-time staffing. That versatility is a positive asset at all levels, in all kinds of activities in the business. It will be those who are the most willing to learn who will advance in this environment. Opening the opportunity to do so is the critical first step. In today’s industrial arena, where so many critical skills are in short supply, companies simply can’t afford to let good talent go to waste. **MT**

Developing The Workforce You Need

As many companies have found, it’s not always possible to maintain a dedicated group of in-house employee-development specialists. External help through consultants is available to help those businesses in the following ways:

- Analyzing and diagnosing the needs for an employee-development program
- Assessing and showing the benefits of implementing employment-development programs
- Developing training programs customized for specific departments and/or employees

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Whatever effort a business may put into acquiring the new culture referenced in this article, the return on investment will exceed the cost. The ROI will be seen in higher productivity of each individual, as well as their teams as a whole.

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