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How Great Leaders Develop People

By Marcel Schwantes

Editor's Note: In the November 2015 and February 2016 editions of The Stepping Stone,¹ executive coach Marcel Schwantes outlined how great leaders display authenticity and value people—two of the foundations of effective servant leadership. Here Schwantes returns for Part 3 of a six-part series that delves into the best practices of how a servant leader values people.

As we build on the ideas presented in this series, we focus on the third thing that great leaders do differently: They develop people.

There are three exceptional ways that great leaders go about doing this.

THEY PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING AND GROWTH

What you'll find in most healthy organizations is a high commitment to growing their employees. If you happen to work in such an environment, you'll probably notice a strong bond between top leadership and training and human resources functions working together to:

- Identify their employees' gifts, talents and strengths for the best job fit so that they can reach their potential.
- Champion a "learning spirit" within the organization, sending a clear message that "growing our people is one of our highest priorities."

Employees who responded more positively to these questions worked in business units with higher levels of productivity, retention and customer satisfaction.

- Give meaning and purpose to the employees' work, adding further motivation.
- Provide ongoing training, coaching and mentoring opportunities that are aligned with job purpose, performance measures, best-in-class customer service, and fulfilling the organizational mission.

THEY BUILD UP OTHERS THROUGH ENCOURAGEMENT AND AFFIRMATION

Gallup Organization researchers spent decades accurately measuring employee engagement, which resulted in their Q12 Engagement Survey. They have interviewed more than 25 million employees around the world to find the core of a great workplace.

The 12 questions are designed to be posed to employees. And from the perspective of the employee, many of the questions, I will submit to you, point to the principles of encouraging and affirming employees to be the best they can be.

The results can also be boiled down to 12 "look-in-the-mirror" questions that every leader, manager, executive or HR professional can ask to understand how their companies measure up on the key elements needed to keep their most talented employees.

If you're a manager, and your employees were asked the following about you, how would you do?

- In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
- Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
- At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
- In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
- This last year, have I had the opportunity at work to learn and grow?

The research also makes a strong business case for growing leaders in management roles.

Employees who responded more positively to these questions worked in business units with higher levels of productivity, retention and customer satisfaction. The opinions formed by employees pointed to their immediate manager as the critical player in building and maintaining a great workplace. Once again, as the old saying goes, people leave managers, not companies.

THEY HAVE HONEST CONVERSATIONS DURING THE ONBOARDING PROCESS

First of all, if you're new to onboarding, we're not talking about orientation during the first day or week of hire. Effective on-



boarding can extend three to nine months after a hire date, sometimes longer. Research is saying that a typical employee's mind isn't made up about staying or leaving a new company until month six! Companies are catching on to this emotional element and doing something about it.

I want to bring out some key questions that you should ask to find out if you are doing the things that lead to a great new hire experience. These questions are meant to trigger a response for you to be more intentional about having conversations that lead to high employee engagement during those crucial first few months.

- Do you as a leader/manager engage your new hires in “How can we/I help you with your professional development interests?” conversations in the first month?
- Do you as a leader/manager engage new hires in conversations about what motivates them within the first one to two weeks of employment?

- Do most of your employees have development plans? If so, do these plans get discussed periodically one-on-one?
- Are you, as leader/manager, actively helping employees to advance their plans by talking with them?

Let's end with a question to think about: What are some great techniques that you currently use to develop your people? ■



Marcel Schwantes is principal and co-founder of Leadership from the Core. His company's biggest calling is to help leaders build high-trust cultures and achieve optimal organizational health through servant leadership. Reach him at info@coachmarcel.com or sign up for free teleseminars at www.leadershipfromthecore.com.

ENDNOTE

¹ You can access these online at www.SOA.org/ld.