

From *The Chronicle Herald* – Jan. 29/07

Commitment must be earned

BILL HOWATT

IN BUSINESS as well as public organizations, leaders are being challenged to make operational decisions in a quest to provide the best services and products for their internal and external customers.

Often the gap between an effective decision and its implementation is the people factor. A common question asked by leaders today is, "How do I get the maximum utilization and productivity out of my workforce?"

Research from human resource management sources indicates that increasing organizational commitment is an effective strategy for increasing workforce commitment that will have a positive influence on the organization's overall productivity, profitability and competitive advantage.

The science of managing people is far from perfect, but this column introduces strategies for strengthening organizational commitment:

- Determine the kind of organizational culture that is desired and then work collectively with stakeholders to define it.
- Implement a vehicle for sharing accurate and meaningful information to assist both leaders and employees to have the same information. As well, evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the information flow on a regular basis.
- Act on meaningful information so the workforce has evidence and experience that there is value in providing accurate information.
- Engage the workforce using the organization's values. Managers who do not comply must be addressed quickly to get on board.
- Implement out-of-cycle feedback so that all employees get regular and meaningful feedback to coach them toward improvement and to acknowledge good work. Employees do not always need money to feel appreciated; often, recognition and a sincere thank you go a long way. •Promote work-life effectiveness strategies to help the workforce deal with the challenges of balancing home and work. In addition to employee assistance programs, companies can do many things to help their employees by using innovation and ingenuity to implement such things as flex work times and locations. Traditional nine-to-five jobs are making less sense for the new workforce that wants more flexibility and options.

Howatt HR Consulting Inc.



- Align leaders to a common leadership philosophy. That defines how the leaders influence, manage, teach and acknowledge the workforce and is a critical element for building organizational commitment.
- Provide incentives that are competitive with competing organizations. Money and incentives are important but in tight market conditions employees will select a culture that is healthy and supportive more often than one that has a reputation as being a place that has little regard for people.
- Provide clear career paths, meaningful training and performance appraisals that are informative and educational.
- Audit the organization's culture using a climate survey at least once a year to assess what the workforce is really thinking.
- Use exit interviews to determine strengths and weaknesses from the employees' point of view and to evaluate the level of organizational commitment to determine whether the organization is on the right track.

While the above points appear to make sense, many companies have a gap between knowing what is right and being able to do it. One of the single biggest competitive edges in business today is its people.

One important coaching point for all leaders to remember is commitment cannot be bought; it can only be earned.

'The only way to truly understand any organization's DNA is to do a detailed analysis.'

