

The Missing Link: Important Observations as to Why Companies Can Be Burdened With Negativity and Distrust

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Companies don't have one culture. They have as many as they have supervisors or managers. You want to build a strong culture? Hold every manager accountable for the culture that he or she builds

– Marcus Buckingham, coauthor of "*First, Break All the Rules*"

Introduction:

The purpose of this brief is to provide an overview of one theory of why a great number of companies have much more negativity and distrust between their managers and employees than any company would really want. As you reflect on this brief, please consider how it applies to your present situation.

Too often, companies look for new and inventive ways to bribe and/or threaten their employees to comply and simply do the jobs that they signed on for. This leaves many leaders befuddled and wondering if anything would work to help decrease negativity – and some believe nothing would make things better. This is, unfortunately, the truth for many companies, which end up on a road called US vs. THEM, where no company really wants to be, as the costs are much too great.

This brief will explore some important observations for understanding some of the potential root causes of negativity, as well as recommendations for reducing negativity.

Let's Begin:

Do you ever wonder why there is so much negativity and distrust in the workplace and within many human relationships? For example, let's assume you are the leader, and you are getting the impression that there is a vast amount of negativity, much more than you would like to have.

Where do you start to remove it?

Many companies have tried, and understand that negativity is present, but are really not clear where to start to address it. The good news is that the majority of companies, if they had a clear, measurable path, would spend millions to fix this concern, because they know it is costing them many more millions by doing nothing.

However, there are no quick fixes, and to fix it over time, companies must understand it at a deep level, and forget the overnight solutions. Let's begin by exploring some of the challenges a company faces, which may help to explain some of the root causes of negativity.

Some Causes:

A. Company (Fundamental Attribution Errors)

1. Vision – the vision for the company comes from the top, and does not involve the employees. This vision is not updated year to year, it eventually becomes a fixture on the wall that many employees dismiss and over time become completely oblivious to its meaning, because they do not have any ownership for it. The opposite end of ownership is entitlement. When employees feel ownership, many become driven to focus on what they can control, that being their opinions. These opinions can become negative, and draw great amounts of energy from the person, peers, and company.
2. Projections, Plans, and Profit Targets are determined and measured only at Senior Levels – not only do many companies not involve all employees in the above criteria, they do not share important numbers. The fact is, closed books breed distrust. Companies that do not involve employees in budgeting and projects are missing the opportunity to teach all employees in the big picture. This involvement helps to enhance the ownership and loyalty factor.
3. The focus of the company is 90% on the P&L, and 10% on the employee. This may be an exaggeration, but the point is that the bottom line drives the company. The other point is that everyone in the company lives in a reactive mode, waiting to see how the company will respond to market demands, etc. Yes, this is a part of business, though unless companies build reserves of trust in their employees, and they know they are of value, they will spend a great deal of time worrying on variables over which they have no control. The paradox is that the company would be further ahead if each employee was committed to what they can control. When fear is in a culture; not far behind is negativity. Fear is a symptom of perceiving oneself is powerless.
4. Communication Breakdown and Gaps on a Regular Basis – this happens a great deal of the time because of the lack of strategically effective vertical communication, and again everyone knows it. The comment, “We are working on it,” seldom helps or is believed. The fact is, it is really a simple thing to fix; it requires new thinking, new methods, and commitment.
5. Large Gaps in Treatment of Employees – The reality is for some reason managers end up getting more comforts and benefits than the employees. Why is this? Companies too often forget that with no employees the managers would not have jobs. Companies need to remove the class system, treat all employees with dignity, and work hard not to create internal class systems. Yes, senior people make more money, and people lower on the

food chain understand that, though when the senior personnel are getting more in all instances, there will be underground resentment; this is only human nature. Companies that work to treat all equally now are seeing the benefits and value of building a community that takes care of its own! All employees like being treated equally and with respect; there can be no place for egos in today's business; they breed division.

6. Companies that Attempt to use Coercion to Motivate. James Barrette once said, "Human beings will only do what they want and will seldom ever do what they do not want." The best way to get employees to do more is to understand the stages of motivation and motivational strategies. Companies need to focus on building their human capital, and invest time, resources, and money. For example, in North America, addictions cost \$150 billion a year. We are paying this now. If we focus more money on building people, then people with skills deficits may not end up using as many negative behaviors, such as addictions, to cope. This analogy can work for most negative issues and behaviors companies are facing. Companies are learning more than ever that managing people using negative emotions (judging and fear) will only create more negative emotion. How could they create anything else? Respect is earned; so are trust and loyalty!

B. Employee (Fundamental Core Skills Missing)

1. Perceptions of their Value – too many employees believe they are always told what to do, never consulted, and end up perceiving that they are just a number. They live their lives by the laws of external locus of control. They feel powerless, and will have little loyalty to a company, as they feel the company has little to them.
2. Perception of their Role – Too many hear only what they are told about their targets and goals, and have little to no ownership of creating their own personal goals and targets day to day. They also do not have the responsibility to determine quality; they are told what is right and wrong.
3. Perception of Accountability – for many companies, this is the root cause of a huge fundamental gap, which is the source of negativity. This gap is the result of an innocent assumption that all employees who are being asked to be accountable have the skills to act responsibly. One cannot be accountable to any process, if they are not first responsible to themselves.
4. Lack of Life Management Skills – many employees just do not have the core skills of life management, life planning, and life compensation. We assume they have them, though many do not have the skills they need to be as successful and happy in life as they could be. You cannot separate the employee's home life from their work life. Companies that are active in life management strategies beyond just EAP are in a post facto strategy. Many employees would be so much more effective if over time they were assisted to

develop competencies other than just their career core skills. Skills such as life management, communication, conflict resolution, goal setting, emotional intelligence, and internal locus of control are but a few examples. The point is, we know many people are missing core skills, and unless the employer provides the opportunity to learn them, they may never on their own seek out these skills.

C. One Source of Negativity in the Workplace

One major flaw in the education system is that we do not spend enough energy teaching people how to be responsible and on the development of central life management core skills that are needed for a person to truly understand what accountability really is, and all that goes with it.

One major deficit is that many people do not have the life management skills needed to act truly responsibly. Without these, they can get lost in the quagmire of work, and lose the meaning of what they are doing and why they are doing it, which often breeds a negative internal process we define as negative judgment.

This process first occurs when a person starts to judge themselves based on their internal expectations and criteria that they have created as the way they think life should be. This picture comes from how they have process the external world.

The cause and effect of a person who does not have the core skills of responsibility puts them at risk of creating internal beliefs and expectations that are unrealistic and based on emotions, not facts.

When a person starts to judge themselves and others, they become less able to act responsibly. This then can result in a person turning on their negative judging filter, which sets the stage to miss any good things in their life, as they focus only on the negative.

This negative loop becomes a self-fulfilling destiny that is for many outside their awareness that their thinking is what is really creating the reality they are living in. Many people will focus on what others are doing, when in fact it is their choices.

When this process occurs, the original intent is lost. When a person becomes very judgmental, they look at the surface, and seldom at the motive. This is a dangerous, negative loop to be caught in. It can leave a person believing that there is nothing they can ever do!

In my opinion, NEGATIVITY is one of the biggest costs to a company. We all know it directly impacts productivity in a negative manner.

Managers with coaching cannot easily change negativity if the person does not want to learn how to act responsibly to themselves and others. Without this, a person will seldom, if ever, be able to act to their potential in terms of accountability and productivity.

Evolution of Negativity and Distrust

Negative Loop -

When a person is not able to achieve their Expectations they are at risk of developing a set of

NOTE: When this occurs the person will too because they live life via external locus of control, will continue to live in a negative loop.

Realistic Expectations

1. Responsibility = 2. Accountability = 3. Internal Choice = 4. Positive Action

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This Direction is the Road to Accountability

As you can see in the above figure, there are four linear steps for a person to create positive actions. This is based on the presupposition that positive actions will present positive emotions and positive thinking, thus judgment will not be an issue.

The challenge is when a company asks the employee to be accountable, it is assuming that the employee has the core skills of responsibility.

In the above figure, responsibility has an arrow to realistic expectations. When a person operates from an internal locus of control (responsible for their actions and thinking), they are influenced by the environment, and they can start to develop unrealistic expectations based on faulty logic (e.g., no one cares about what I do, so it does not matter). The person takes this thinking and loops from something being done to them, to where they start to do something back, whether it is internal or external, and that being to judge the source of their pain. In the above, the 'no one cares' may really be their direct manager.

In all human interactions, no one will be able to meet a person's needs all the time. That is why it is important for a person to learn how to meet their own needs, and not to judge themselves or

others. No one is perfect, and life happiness is based for the most part on the internal choices a person makes. As the old umpire once said, “It is not anything until I call it something.” It is important to note that all managers can follow the above loop as well.

Many companies end up having many employees getting caught in these kinds of negative loops, which become sources of negativity that will breed more; it takes only a few apples to spoil the barrel. Many people are too easily influenced. Companies that want to decrease negativity understand they need to put a plan in place, and that it will not work for all, though the negative ones will self-sort themselves and move on.

Solutions for Promoting Responsibility

The solution is to provide employees with the core skills to discover for themselves how to act responsibly. Consider the overall health of the general population: how many people are overweight, unhappy, in broken relationships, have addictive disorders, stress and anger about life.

Until we teach them how to take charge of themselves, leaders are being incongruent if they believe an employee can be accountable to their fullest potential. The solution to this is for companies to take on this missing link. It will take time, some strategic thinking and development, with a commitment over the long term to overcome it.

All employees need to be responsible, and understand that they own their own choices. Companies then need to allow employees to self-sort themselves and make choices; we cannot make people be responsible and respectful of others. Employees need to make their own choices; companies need to decide on what kind of culture will be tolerated, and then be 100% congruent from top to bottom. The test of time is what changes cultures, not flavors of the month.

Companies need to set a course, and if it is based in sound logic, hold that course. For example, who are more productive, happy or unhappy employees? Do you have to measure this, or is it universal, like the sun coming up in the morning?

Companies that become clear and understand the above theory have the opportunity to dramatically reduce the negativity in their workplace that erodes production and the human spirit.

Consider the following questions:

- a) Do you believe as leaders the majority of employees understand how to be responsible to them?
- b) Are they being responsible to themselves?
- c) What are your criteria for responsibility?
- d) Why are many employees so negative?
- e) What drives it?

- f) When an employee is negative about himself or herself, how can they be positive about a company?

Recommendations for Managers for Reducing Negativity in the Workplace

1. **Development of Managers' Leadership Skills** – the goal is to help managers understand what management is vs. leadership. The best way to motivate a negative person is work to build a strong relationship through being non-judgmental, using motivational strategies, and allowing the employee to self-sort and choose their life path. Great leaders allow employees to choose their path and lead with their passion and manage with their mind.
2. **Managing Employees with Facts and Skills, Not Emotion** – One fault for some managers is they manage with their emotion, and own too many issues they do not need to by being emotionally involved.
3. **Development of Coaching Skills** – the highest order of communication is coaching. Great leaders are great teachers. They are resources for their team, and work to coach employees who are motivated. Coaching helps people develop more core responsibility skills so that they can more effectively understand and accept accountability, and that comes with this responsibility. If a manager cannot coach the employee, they move to the next highest order, then work to lead them. If this does not work, then they need to manage them, and not take ownership for the employee's choices. If an employee is not motivated and willing to be coached, that is their choice.
4. **Commit to Improving the Culture** – companies can make a commitment to improving the culture with mindful observation, and study of the root cause of judgment. Managers need to focus their judgments on solutions, not problems. When we focus on the problem long enough, we may come to believe there is no solution. Consider the impact of positive and empowering judgment. Awareness of employees' feelings is crucial to maintaining the quality and continuation of relationships in and out of the workplace.
5. **Build Visions and Agreements Every Year** – managers need to spend time each year focusing on how to bridge the employees' visions with the company's, so that there is an internal congruency. Empowering employees to move from entitlement to ownership is that they have to be active in the decision making of the day-to-day operations. This is not to say that management cannot make any decisions on their own. The point is that spending time to get buy in and commitment of employees is time well spent, as long as there is a process that is logical and honest. Employees do not like going through activities that result in no actions. Only ask employees their opinions if you are going to

listen. And for a company to have employees who feel pride in their work, they need to be asked!

6. Senior Management: Do NOT Assume – very often, senior management makes some assumptions on core leadership competencies. Experience has nothing to do with competency. There are lots of young managers who are much more competent than their senior peers. Leadership core competencies need to be learned and practiced over and over for many years. A two-day course in Chicago in 1994 is seldom enough. One of the big impacts a senior manager can have on the culture is to continue to develop its leaders, as they will become the teachers of future leaders of the company. Middle management is a tough spot, as they get it from the top and the bottom. They are the pacers of success! Professional development takes time and money, though the return will be great as long as the managers are held accountable, and measured closely to the expectations of the company and employees.

In closing, negativity seems to be an accepted and natural reality in most businesses. Negativity gets promoted as a company problem. This may be true, though the company is made up of employees, thus it can only improve when everyone makes an agreement to improve it. What management can do is put the resources into the process of people development, with the goal of company growth and success as its reward.

The solution and success in the end will occur, one employee at a time. This brief has provided a paradigm and explanation that challenges the expectations of accountability. Companies expect ALL employees to be accountable, but the simple truth is not all can be, because they do not have the core skills of responsibility. Negativity's workplace roots are found in judgment, which comes from people's unrealistic expectations. Regardless of one's rank, they are an employee, so this theory is applicable to all members of the workforce.