



Stretched Too Thin

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

We hear that the only sure things in life are death and taxes. If you are a manager, one sure thing is that people will tell you there are not enough employees to do the job. I have yet to find an organization where the workers do not feel stretched beyond their ability.

Productivity makes an interesting study, because most behavioral scientists agree that in any organization the actual productivity is a small fraction of the capability inherent in the people. Research reported by the Gallup Organization in 2010 indicates that for average organizations, only 33% of the workers are engaged, 49% of them are not engaged, and 18% are actively disengaged. This low productivity is usually not the fault of the workers, but the result of a poor culture established by top leaders.

The paradox here is that while there is a perpetual outcry for more people in most organizations, the human resources that are available are grossly underutilized. By establishing a culture of higher trust, managers can change the equation dramatically.

We do not need more people; we need better utilization of the people we already have. How do we solve the age-old mystery of getting higher levels of effort and engagement on the part of people? The irony is that when managers look to improve productivity, they often focus on numerous other things and forget that true productivity lies with the motivation of people.

For example, I read an interesting article on productivity in the Encyclopedia of Management 2006, which gives 17 ways to improve productivity in an organization. They are:

1. capital investments in production
2. capital investments in technology
3. capital investments in equipment
4. capital investments in facilities
5. economies of scale

6. workforce training and experience
7. technological changes
8. work methods
9. procedures
10. systems
11. quality of products
12. quality of processes
13. quality of management
14. legislative and regulatory environment
15. general levels of education
16. social environment
17. geographic factors

Notice the amazing lack of motivational aspects in this list. The only factor in the whole list that has much to do with motivation is item 13, quality of management. True, we can improve productivity with capital investments or systems, but the real gold is changing the morale of the people doing the work. That takes an investment of a different kind. My thesis is that the missing ingredient in productivity is trust.

The Trust Across America Organization has gathered some compelling data over the past decade that shows corporations with high trust achieve 500-600% greater returns than the S&P 500. So productivity, and the resulting profits, are available if we can only educate leaders on how to build and maintain higher trust. That revelation means we can stop whining about not enough people and start focusing more effort on the skills needed to grow trust.

Improving the level of trust in an organization starts at the very top. The most senior managers must recognize it is their behaviors and the signals they send that set the tone for everything that happens in their organization. There are several groups and consultants, including myself, who specialize in helping organizations understand the pathways to higher trust.

I recommend that all top managers have a key thrust to change their behavior patterns so that trust begins to grow from the highest levels. Once started, the improvement in trust will naturally flow down through the entire organization, and the first thing you know, the outcry for more people will become muted. The employees are there just waiting to put their shoulder into the work once they are treated the right way.



Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at** www.Leadergrow.com, bwhipple@leadergrow.com **or** 585.392.7763