

When employees win, everyone wins.

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There are three compelling reasons why being among the best of the best employers in Hampton Roads is important.

The first reason is that attracting and retaining the best and most committed employee talent benefits the employer directly. High capacity workers migrate toward employers that offer them challenges commensurate with their talent. With a higher capacity workforce employers engage them as value-added problem solvers. In the absence of a sense of reciprocity, employees tend to balance their discretionary contribution with the value they receive in return. Employees who believe that their organization consistently does right by them will give back a higher quality performance.

Tracking the impact of discretionary capacity is difficult. Marcus Buckingham, a popular author on this topic, has done just that. His article published in Fast Company in 2001, titled: [Your Boss Has An Attitude Problem](#), indicated that as many as 74% of the workforce is likely withholding valuable capacity. That is both a staggering number and a realistic one. The return-on-investment in the recovery of capacity, in the form of enriching the workforce culture, is obvious. When employees win, everyone wins, including customers.

Second, the employer's return-on-investment pays a dividend that raises the bar on performance for the local labor pool. Of greatest concern for most employers today is not the competition for customers, but the competition for the best employees. Talent and commitment flow toward those employers who demonstrate that they equitably share the gains made by their workforce.

It is easy to understand why a mobile workforce will migrate toward a vibrant local economy and away from locations that don't offer sufficient options. On a macro scale, the current immigration conditions in this country make the situation obvious. This country is exporting jobs at an astounding rate, yet migration (legal or not) continues to be toward the challenging opportunity not just the immediate job. On another front, educators watch carefully the number of state resident students who migrate toward better employment opportunities elsewhere after receiving their degree. Keeping the best talent in a thriving community is a lot easier when a community of employers resolve to be attractive to the labor pool.

Third, the long-term local growth shifts the regional flow of profits from out-bound to in-bound. When an out-of-town employer opens a local "franchise" that is good for the local workforce yet it is always important to reflect on the direction that profits flow. A large organization centered in Detroit, for example, may employ several thousand workers locally. The total compensation package may even be favorable to the workforce. Few would doubt that from an employment standpoint, this is a desirable condition. From a profit flow standpoint, however, Hampton Roads may be the loser.

Wal-Mart is a visible target. Yes, they add jobs to the local market - and yes that is a good thing. They are philanthropic. Some of their money does help locals that need help. But the

billionaires who profit most, and the thriving hub of the Wal-Mart empire are not nestled in Hampton Roads. As the 23rd largest economy in the world, Wal-Mart's Bentonville area prospers justifiably, and so should Hampton Roads when it becomes a dominant national and international provider in its own right.

Discretionary effort normally matches the employer's contribution to workforce well being. The best of the best have an attraction unlike any other. They attract the best workforce committed to developing or recovering the capacity needed to thrive. Conversely, a workforce that just manages to get by characterizes low capacity organizations.

So, organizations interested in developing new (or recovering lost) capacity have to do more. The culture has to be satisfying. Fun, on occasion, is a valuable part of the work life equation. The balance between work and life off the job has to be equitable. Reward and recognition for a job well done must meet or exceed expectations. Participation in problem solving that impact the workforce must be sufficient that workers have a sense of ownership in solutions. Having pride in one's organization is a minimal plateau. A better scenario asks each and every member of their workforce to take pride in their individual contribution to the organization's success as well. This spirit defines the attraction of being among the best of the best.

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