

Here's the high five

For years we've been fighting the inclination to KISS - Keep It Simple, Stupid! Organizations are anything but simple - they are highly complex. Besides, using the word "keep" conjures up keeping things the same, a concept that just doesn't work well in a constantly shifting environment. Yet the attraction, perhaps even the demand, for simplicity is appealing. We advocate the shift in thinking to MISS - Make It Systemically Simple!

An organization, regardless of size, is a system. It is a human system, in fact, with all the complex attributes that go with both humanity and systems. To simplify this complexity we think there are five sets of interactive and highly related elements at work. The approach to creating the best places to work lies not in the pieces of the system, but in the uniqueness of how these complex elements interact and relate to each other. Here are the five interacted pieces.

Leadership-Management-Supervision, and the Environment. One of the most important functions of an organization's senior leadership (this includes the governing board, council, etc.) is to interact with the community and the professional domain of the organization. The workforce has a lofty expectation that their organization is held in high regard in the community and contributes to good works.

An organization with a good healthy reputation will likely attract the best candidates for employment and develop a highly cooperative and collaborative culture. The exchange for products and services with customers in the environment creates the revenue flow from which resources are distributed - benefits packages!

People and Skills. People come to the job with a set of natural attributes and skills blended into a desirable and productive mix. The degree to which people get the opportunity to put the best of this mix into their work will determine, to a large extent, their job satisfaction - dare I suggest even their enthusiasm.

It is predictable that people are most often hired for their skills and let go because the natural attributes come in conflict with the way the organization works (culture). Too often employers tap into the skills and leave the natural attributes to wither.

Facilities-Accommodations, and Tools of the Trade. A satisfied workforce goes to work at a facility that they can be proud of, spend their working hours in space that accommodates their personal and professional needs, and

provides them with convenient access to the tools required for them to be successful. Job satisfaction may not be improved with the latest of modern conveniences, but satisfaction will plummet when employees deduce that archaic surroundings and equipment are a testament to their value. These surroundings and tools are the evidence people often need as reassurance of a value-added balance.

Organization Structure, and Alignment. The best organization structural design focuses on effective product and service delivery goals. In paragraph one, above, we alluded to this "trade" of revenue for products and services. The closer every member of the workforce comes to understanding their fit in that equation, the greater the job satisfaction.

Every employee comes to work every day with a certain amount of discretionary effort, which can be withheld without notice. The best places to work optimize the contribution of discretionary effort from every single employee intentionally.

Written Guidance and Information. There may be one best way to do a job, but it is more likely that there are several ways to get a job done successfully.

Organizations that document and encourage these alternatives provide a resource for employees that enable flexibility within parameters - and satisfaction soars. Individuality and resourcefulness take on a life of their own that tends to foster innovation. The flow of information from those having it to those who want or need it sends a clear message of partnership/ownership and trust (shared priority). Certainly some information must be confidential and generally people recognize this. More often, however, information is intentionally withheld for power-gathering reasons that do little good.

Joseph J. Lacroix is the founder and president of LTI, a classical organization development software and literature firm. He is also a principal at Quality of WorkLife Consultants in Newport News and has been a judge for INSIDE BUSINESS' four Best Places To Work in Hampton Roads competitions. Lacroix can be reached at 591-0807 or e-mail ltodi@aol.com.



JOSEPH J. LACROIX