

Required Reading for Growing Companies



caskey's corner

By Wayne Caskey
for Smart CEO

A CEO's Labor

The profitable path of dreams fulfilled

As I celebrated Labor Day this year, many images from the past crowded in upon my consciousness.

- At 13, marching in the Labor Day parade in Joliet next to my father, democrat candidate for Congress, feeling solidarity with him, union representatives and workmen.

- At 17, noticing the nimbleness of the migrant workers' fingers in our Michigan orchard, feeling the great divide between ownership and supervision, and "hired hands."

- As a neophyte lawyer, marveling at the resilience of secretaries at the Kansas City law firm doing their best to "get out the work" in the face of the explosiveness and eccentricities of their bosses.

- As a young labor lawyer, recognizing the relentlessness of the assembly line in the Kansas refrigerator plant, pondering the dehumanizing effect of mass production.

- As a new corporate executive, eyeing the sweat on the Oven Man's brow, wondering about his working conditions and his safety.

- As a management spokesman, noting both the earnestness and the cynicism of the union shop committee in Georgia, hoping for the best, expecting the worst.

- As a labor negotiator, relying on the businesslike attitude of the oft-maligned Teamster agents, "Let's get a deal we both can live with."

These early experiences light up corners of my mind - dramatic examples of the opposition of the vested interests of labor and management. Yet, even then, the question kept bubbling up - need it be so?

Now, it isn't. For me, creativity and win/win solutions have replaced confrontations, power struggles and razor thin contract approvals as indicia of success.

As with me, so with the modern world of CEOs. We don't want "hands" in our organizations, automatons following assembly

line-like rules and procedures, like those described by Vachel Lindsay in "The Leaden-Eyed":

...young souls... smothered out before They do quaint deeds and fully flaunt their pride... babes grow(n) dull,... ox-like, limp and leaden-eyed.

We want our organizations like those described by David Whyte, in *The Heart Aroused - Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*, which instructs us to "allow people to bloom and grow, to be excited, to be proud of their work, and to understand the connection of the work to a greater ecology than the organization alone."

If we are to have such an organization, what are we called upon to do? Whyte says:

1. We must permit failure, our own and others', rather than erect rules to prevent failure.

2. We must admit that our organization is not an end in itself, that it exists solely to serve a much wider world.

3. We cannot call upon our

associates to sacrifice their humanity without cutting off their access to their sources of imagination and creativity, so essential to long-term business success.

Many of us as CEOs subscribe to the imagination and creativity of our immediate management team. In fact, we recruit for it and then depend on its functioning. But most of us stop there, merely hoping that our team will recruit and inspire that imagination and creativity in their teams.

Suppose, instead, we consciously stimulate the creativity and imagination of everyone in the organization. Not just a reward for the employee suggestion of the month, but an honest-to-God, serious plan to be open to whatever surfaces from that great well-spring of the collective creative juices of our organization.

Judy Garland said, "Always be a first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of someone else." If we as CEOs permit that to occur for everyone throughout our companies, what happens?

1. We as CEOs have to admit

the absolute legitimacy of individuality in the workplace, and make a place for it. This requires openness on our part, which perceived economic pressures may have closed off for some of us.

2. Individual expression and fulfillment, “doing what I was meant to do,” have to rank right along with making the annual and three year goals (or making the monthly payroll) as top values for the company.

3. We have to accept that there will be turnover as individual goals cannot, for various reasons, be met in our corporate settings. This means that people who leave to pursue their goals must be praised, rather than condemned as persons

who have jumped ship.

4. Having given individual fulfillment prominence in our company, we have to accept that we are more vulnerable ourselves to the initiatives of stockholders or directors who do not share or fully share this value.

What benefits do we expect, to justify these vulnerabilities?

1. A vibrant organization.
2. An organization where associates support each other’s fulfillment, inside or outside the organization.
3. An organization where individuals throughout the company continually surprise us.

4. People, who for whatever reason cannot or will not subscribe to this value, will leave.

5. An organization, collectively made up of people “doing what they love” will be an organization where “the money will follow,” perhaps in cascading amounts we could never have imagined.

Read again these five organizational traits. Aren’t they what we really want for our organizations? They describe an atmosphere where people’s hearts and souls engage the organization, where morale is effervescent, and where imagination and creativity flourish.

So, we have the opportunity to transform the 19th and 20th cen-

tury concept of employment of “hands” to a concept of employment of “hearts.” “Minds” alone will not do, nor will rah-rah sales slogans, nor an attitude of “sacrifice” for corporate goals. Nor will an empathetic V.P. of Human Resources.

If we wish to provide an arena where hopes are fulfilled, and cynicism banished, we, as leaders of the organization, must elevate individual fulfillment to the level of a corporate value - that is our “labor,” one truly worthy and truly worth it.

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