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Focus on their Strengths

Managers are the number one reason why good people leave their jobs, This has been researched many times and confirmed again by Gallup. What everyone wants, more than anything, is management who appreciates them and helps them improve.

When employees do not have good relationships with their managers, they will leave or, even worse, stay - and just do the minimum to maintain their jobs. Studies have also confirmed that managers are the key to employee morale and job satisfaction. My own experience has shown that over 70% of all dysfunctional employee behavior is caused by their manager.

So what should a manager do? Margaret Greenberg, President of The Greenberg Group, and Dana Arakawa, a program associate at the John Templeton Foundation, wanted to confirm if having a constructive supportive manager can make a difference. As it turns out they do.

The research also revealed there are three specific behaviours in which superior managers engage that made the difference:

1. They focus on employee strengths rather than weakness.
2. They provide on-going recognition and encouragement.
3. They maintain a positive perspective even in the midst of difficulties.

The good news is that these are behaviours all managers can learn.

Unfortunately, most organizations are obsessed with fixing weaknesses. They conduct performance reviews, try 360-degree assessments, and implement complex tracking systems. These systems attempt to evaluate how well employees and managers are measuring up to predefined goals and common competencies frequently defined by the Human Resources department.

These assessments often pay very little attention to an employee's strengths. Most performance reviews and development programs focus almost exclusively on weaknesses. Managers are then instructed to focus on the employee's perceived deficits and coach for development in those areas.

Creating an employee strengths-based approach involves teaching supervisors to become positive and supportive coaches. In my experience, the process for this to happen becomes easier when the manager is willing to focus on the employee's strengths during interactions, and minimize any discussion around weaknesses.

Employees are often told they are not good enough unless they change, and for them, change usually means working on weaknesses. As a manager, if you are more focused on employee weaknesses, you will be expending a lot of wasted energy. By working on

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weaknesses, the best you might achieve is average. However, as Marcus Buckingham said in his book, *Go Put Your Strengths to Work*, “You will grow the most in the area of your strengths.”

By always focusing on weaknesses, a manager will ultimately stifle strengths. Spending time discussing failures will only make you and your employees feel worse and you will inevitably fail to see the positive contributions and successful outcomes. In the end, it will destroy confidence, performance and relationships.

The greatest chance for increasing productivity and creating a healthy coaching relationship with your employees rests in acknowledging and improving what they are already good at, maintaining positive feedback, while spending less time pointing out the flaws.

Just like Donald O. Clifton and Paula Nelson suggest in *Soar With Your Strengths*, “If you develop your strengths to the maximum, the strength becomes so great it overwhelms the weaknesses.”

Instead of thinking about what is wrong with employees, identify and develop what is right.

Then it must be asked, is there a benefit to the organization? You will search a long time to find a company or organization with unhappy employees that has happy customers. Employees are revenue-producing assets, not expenses; however, many organizations invest in equipment improvement - but not people improvement.

Unfortunately, many companies try to improve their image by spending thousands on marketing, before they will address the real issue of untrained managers causing unhappy employees

On the other hand, I have never encountered a company that has extremely happy employees with unhappy customers. The formula for success in any organization is simply this: leaders look after the managers; managers look after the people, and the people will look after the customers.

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