

Don't Look Now, But One of Your People Is About to Jump Ship

By Stephen A. Saenz

"On average, employees change jobs every four years, but they THINK about it every four minutes." Netcentives Magazine Ad

When I read the ad quoted at the top of this article, I wasn't sure if I would laugh or cry. If you're responsible for hiring and/or managing people today, you might do both. According to a recent study conducted by Andersen Consulting (Oct. 4 issue of Business Week) 75% of executives worldwide rank HUMAN PERFORMANCE ahead of productivity in strategic importance. 80% say that by the year 2010, attracting and RETAINING PEOPLE will be the number one challenge for businesses large and small. Those who can figure out how to OVERCOME this great challenge will enjoy a strategic advantage over their competitors. Those who can't, may find themselves looking for a new JOB instead of a new employee! If there is such a thing as a "buyer's market" for jobs, we are definitely in one.

As part of our ongoing commitment to help investment professionals overcome the business challenges they face, we are focusing our efforts these days in the area of HUMAN PERFORMANCE, which includes specific topics such as Leadership Development, Team Development, Hiring & Selection and Performance Measurement (of humans, not portfolios). During the next several months (in this and other forums) I will be discussing a number of strategies that you can use to overcome what we are now calling the "Great Performance Challenge of the New Millennium." The first of these is a leadership strategy called "Building and Maintaining Employee Trust." Now there's a novel idea!

Why focus on employee trust?

In short, because LACK of employee trust is undermining the growth potential of most businesses today (maybe even your own). As with clients, trust is the most important element in the employer-employee relationship. Indeed, it is the most important element in ANY relationship. Without TRUST, there is no relationship, or at least, not a healthy one. A friend of ours from Australia, by the name of Keith Ayers, recently introduced us to a powerful model that managers and team leaders can use to assess their effectiveness at building trust with their employees. The model consists of four key factors or building blocks that determine the level of trust in any relationship. All four factors contribute to the quality or health of the relationship. If any of the four is missing, trust may be jeopardized. As you review the four factors, think about your own situation and ask yourself this question: "How am I doing in ALL FOUR areas?"

Reliability — Do I do what I say I am going to do?

Acceptance — Do I accept others, or am I judgmental?

Openness — How willing am I to give and receive feedback?

Congruence — Are my words in line with my actions?
(i.e., Do I walk my talk?)

Note that all four factors have to do with human BEHAVIOR. In other words, others can OBSERVE how well we are doing in each of these areas. The good news is that most of us EXCEL at one or two of the four trust factors. The bad news is that we all STRUGGLE with the other factors.

Why Trust Is So Important

Without a high level of trust, it is impossible to have a High-Performance Team. The reason is that trust is the key to effective communication. When a team lacks open and honest communication, the members of the team begin to think and act independently, rather than interdependently. When team members begin to look out for themselves instead of each other, bad things can and do happen. We have seen everything from stressful work environments to the disintegration of partnerships. This is especially common in rapidly growing businesses.

In order to prevent this from happening in your business, you need to make sure that you are doing everything you can to build and maintain a high level of trust with each and every member of your team. The Trust Model above can help you do this. One of the interesting things about this model is that all four elements are related to human BEHAVIOR. In other words, people can readily OBSERVE how well (or poorly) we are doing in each of these areas. If we do well, people will generally trust us. If we do poorly, they won't.

The good news is that most of us are pretty good in one or two of the four areas. The bad news is that we tend to struggle with the others. The reason we are good at some and not so good at others is that each of us has a certain BEHAVIOR STYLE. Someone who has a strong sense of urgency for example (like many investment advisors) might find it difficult to be accepting of other team members, especially if the other team members don't share the same sense of urgency. Someone who is highly outgoing and gregarious might find it challenging to follow through on some of their commitments (like being on time). Someone who is very conscientious and good with detail may feel very uncomfortable when it comes to receiving feedback, especially if it is corrective in nature.

Knowing your behavior style, as well as that of your team members, will provide you with some very valuable insight. It will tell you exactly what you need to do in order to build and maintain a high level of trust within your team. As a leader, it will empower you to help the other members of your team improve in the areas they find challenging. The best way to determine a person's behavior style is to use an assessment instrument designed specifically for that purpose. The one that we use is called the Managing for Success Style Analysis Report.