

Are You the Principal From Hell?

Fear is not the way to motivate your design talent

Employees won't relax unless they feel they are in a safe environment. Your company culture will likely be one of either fear, openness, somewhere in between. Ultimately, your company's culture is decided by the people at the top of your company — often the owners.

If you manage your staff with an iron fist, it's time you faced the truth: today's talent requires a new kind of management. Old machinist ways of managing are now obsolete; fear-based cultures are obsolete. The day of the high producer bully is dead. Demographics of today's work force shows that people can vote with their feet — there is no need to stay in an environment where one can't contribute their best.

To create a trusting environment, you need skills that allow you to have powerful conversations effectively. Sandy Blaha, PSMJ Resources consultant, coaches executives in using communication tools, and is a certified trainer in the conflict skills presented by the widely recognized *Crucial Conversations*® course.

“Executives need to ask themselves, ‘How can I do better and receive information with a thank you — non judgmentally without defensiveness?’” says Blaha.

One of the best ways to avoid creating an environment of fear is to approach conflicts using “neutral” language.

Blah explains: “Perhaps you are upset with your accountant for not getting the bills out on time. When approaching the individual, start off the conversation stating the facts: ‘It appears that the bills

were supposed to go out on this day. Is that correct?’”

“Or, say a project manager has a problem with a client, but has kept the issue to himself, even though there was an understanding that he would come to you if there were any issues. Instead of getting mad, try to remain non-accusatory, and practice finding the facts first in every situation.”

Setting clear expectations

A major component of trust comes from setting clear expectations with your staff. There is often a discrepancy between an employee's written job description and the expectations a principal has of that employee. If you want to create trust, you must be clear when setting job responsibilities.

Blaha recommends using a balanced scorecard approach for ensuring clear expectations. At an employee's annual review, break down the expectations set out on paper versus real expectations, and make sure there are no discrepancies.

The return on trust

By building trust, you not only keep your employees around, you will see better performance. You can't get your best from employees if they are afraid to bring you their best ideas — ideas which might be different from yours. You don't always have to be right, and if you listen to your employees and they are comfortable giving you their input, you are likely to learn a lot as well.

Blaha adds, “Not only does the return on trust make you attractive to high performers, it will yield greater productivity, profitability and client loyalty.” ■

How to Land Long-Term Employees

Just because new candidates perform well doesn't necessarily mean they enjoy the environment, the company or the culture. William G. Bliss, business consultant and president of Bliss Associates, recommends the following for optimizing your chances of success:

- Make sure you and your new employee agree on clear standards of measurement for their performance. Set clear goals and objectives to accomplish within the first 6 to 12 months. Have this conversation within the first two weeks of your new employee's start date.
- Ensure your new employee has adequate learning time to become acclimated with the job, the department, the people, and the company. If you expect the person to fully “hit the ground running” you may be expecting the impossible.
- Allow your new employee to meet and get to know the key people who will rely on this person to perform up to the defined expectations.
- Provide the new employee the opportunity to fully understand the goals, mission and values of the company or department.
- Provide regular and honest feedback in a manner that is comfortable for the new employee. If you have some performance issue to discuss with the new employee, hold that discussion as soon as possible to allow for change. Provide as much positive feedback as possible. ■

Mr. Bliss can be reached at (973) 616-8600 or wbliss@blissassociates.com.