




# EIGHT ELEMENTS

Creating a high-performance enterprise

BY SUE BINGHAM



It's no secret that the workforce and the nature of work itself are rapidly changing. Many organizations, particularly large ones, are like an ocean liner that can't turn on a dime. If an organization is not actively promoting and integrating the following eight elements, that organization is already behind and will experience negative impacts as the workforce shrinks and traditional management practices continue.

The root cause is that traditional management practices and H.R. policies have been created to catch the "bad apple." Let's start with the premise that the vast majority of employees are good people—we might even say 95 percent fall in this category. That leaves the small minority of five-percenters or bad apples. Often this group occupies a much larger percentage of managements' time and attention. To try to rid the organization of these people, penalizing and insulting policies are created that often catch good people in their net. When treated the same as a five-percenter, 95-percenters feel embarrassed and de-valued. What's worse, this creates a bureaucratic system that makes it nearly impossible to get rid of those for whom the policies were created.

## A Path to Success

The following eight elements are common sense and uncomplicated, but the absence of them will seriously hurt organizations in the near future.

### 1 Positive Assumptions About People

Dealing with the five-percent unconscious taints your assumptions about people. If leaders have spent time dealing with someone who lies, lays out, does the minimum required and tries to get away with as much as possible, that experience can create a distrust and desire to micromanage and control everyone. Evidence of these assumptions is seen when there is restricted access to specific areas for certain groups, such as doors, cabinets and tool cribs locked. Managers accept performance minimums vs. maximums, information is guarded and self-management is a distant concept. It becomes irrational for employees to feel like valued adults and in return, the organization receives compliance, a lack of passion and a check-the-box performance.

Leading with positive assumptions about the quality and integrity

of the majority of the workforce promotes pride, passion and accountability.

### 2 Identification and Elimination of Negatives

A negative is defined as "anything that minimizes vs. maximizes a person's feeling of value to the organization." Many of these are almost invisible to the people who have the power to eliminate them. Examples include free water or coffee in some areas and not in others, reserved parking for executives, punitive policies that apply to one group of employees but not another, differences in holiday and vacation schedules, late performance appraisals and wage increases.

Most of these negatives are easy to eliminate. Leaders only need to put themselves in the shoes of their hourly-paid employees to see and feel them—and then get rid of them.

### 3 Mutual Trust and Respect

Major headway in creating an environment of mutual trust and respect can be achieved by doing the first two elements. And if a company wants to be able to unlock supplies and equipment and treat people as responsible adults, there must be recognition that there will

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probably be some theft and deceit until the five-percenters are gone. However, it will be worth it to have created a high trust environment for the rest of the workforce. In addition, it creates the standard that trust is a required attribute in order to receive a job offer. Clearly communicate trust as a core value and treat any violation of trust as a dischargeable offense.

## 4 Open, Two-Way, Adult-to-Adult Communication

In essence, share information, be open and avoid secrets. Speak to everyone at every level as you would a neighbor you like. Remember that people, regardless of the type of work they perform, have the same desire for involvement and respect as managers and senior leaders do.

## 5 Employee Engagement

Visionary experts in areas of organizational development predict the end of hierarchies—at least as you know them today. If it can be agreed that the people doing the jobs are the ones who know the jobs the best, why aren't leaders empowering employees to solve problems and create continuous improvement in every organization?

## 6 Training

A company's investment in training reflects its value for people and a clear belief that good people only get better and produce greater results with an investment in their development.

Manufacturing companies often have a substantial budget for preventative maintenance on equipment, but limit (or even reduce if revenue is low) the necessary dollars for maintaining each person's potential capacity.

## 7 Competitive Wages and Benefits

In a high-performance culture, the objective is to make wages and benefits a non-issue. If people are challenged, valued and fairly compensated, they are reluctant to take another job for more money. Fairness is perceived and achieved by regularly checking the market value for all jobs and paying competitively (meaning around and often somewhat above the market midpoint), sharing the survey data if someone is interested and being transparent about ranges and the compensation structure. If a company is providing competitive pay and benefits, there shouldn't be any mystery around this topic.

## 8 High Expectations

Many leaders will admit that they have employees who are only doing the minimum. In most traditional companies, job descriptions are specific with regard to the tasks to be performed. Instead, write job profiles that set high expectations for the results versus the tasks involved. And replace that common phrase at the bottom of those descriptions that says, "All other duties as assigned" with "Proactively support the team and company in achieving its objectives." Now the

person who just waits to be told what to do is no longer meeting the minimum.

When leaders don't set high expectations, they shouldn't be surprised when average results are achieved. Furthermore, high expectations give people a purpose for their work, especially when their leaders believe they will be successful.

### Start Now

There are many applications under each of these elements that convert the words to tangible actions and practices. If any of these eight elements are missing within an organization, it's time to take action. It's valuing employees and doing the right thing that leads to exceptional performance. It really isn't complicated. ☘



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