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What You Don't Know About Your Employees That Will Help You Manage Them Better

To achieve greatness, one must first think greatness

When Darwin first made famous the term “survival of the fittest,” I don't believe he was talking about the strongest species, or the fastest, but rather those species most able to adapt quickly to changing surroundings. Welcome to the early part of the 21st century, where technology has morphed into something one could not imagine just 50 years ago. However, as miraculous as technology has grown, the ability for humans to communicate and understand one another has stagnated.

Sure, our communication between people has become quicker, but it is more superficial than ever. However, this is where those able to adapt to the ever-increasing knowledge that bridges the gap between business and psychology will evolve to a level of success unequalled. In essence, what I am about to share with you regarding communication and development is equivalent to the development of the microchip processor during the 1960s. In short, we will be discussing how to prepare and lead one's mind toward success in an evolutionary way.

What you feed your mind and what you feed the employees' minds is of enormous consequence because subtle changes in wording can have profound effects on mental health and subsequent behavior. As I mentioned above, to achieve greatness, one must first think greatness, and thinking greatness is motivated by belief.

Beliefs form through a combination of experience, environment, and the meaning we make out of both. As managers, one can help shape an employee's perception and thinking about his experiences and the messages received from the environment, and thereby affect his belief in the possibilities that exist through his commitment and hard work. Beliefs can be changed, through experiences and authority figures that challenge an existing mindset in a supportive setting. In essence, people's beliefs about their abilities to expand are flexible and can be changes by shifting their thoughts or mindsets.

Toward a new way of thinking and managing

Mindset can be defined as a view employees have of their successes, mistakes, fears, and triumphs. It plays a pivotal role in an individual's capacity to learn and change. In *Mindset: The new Psychology of Success* (Random House, 2006), Stanford University researcher Carol Dweck writes that mindsets are powerful drivers of perceptions about self and others, as well as one's capabilities and place in the world. They guide the whole interpretation process. Dweck's work identifies two distinctly different mindsets that have the greatest implications for successful learning and change over the lifespan: the "fixed mindset" and the "growth mindset."

"A growth mindset is when you believe that through your own efforts you can cultivate your personal qualities," says Dweck. "If you have this belief, then you are more likely to have a passion for learning because you believe you are developing your qualities. Also, rather than seeing a challenge as something to avoid because it will reveal your weaknesses, you welcome it because you see it as an opportunity to grow and learn.

"A fixed mindset, on the other hand, is when one believes human qualities are carved in stone," she continues. "If you feel you only have a certain amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character, then all you can do is prove that you have the traits you have and hide your deficiencies."

In a growth mindset, you do not always welcome setbacks, but you understand that it is information about how to move forward better next time. In a fixed mindset, a setback calls your ability into question. Everything is about: Am I smart? Am I not smart? However, if you are always managing your image to look sharp, you are not focusing on stretching your boundaries, you are not thinking about them in the most constructive ways, and you are not sticking to things that don't work right away.

Whether we are praising or criticizing, Dweck suggests that you "focus on the process, not on the person." So, if there is a success, even a great achievement, you do not say, "You are a superstar! You have natural talent!" because it puts people into a fixed mindset. Thus, it makes them afraid of doing hard things or of making mistakes, which will hamper future creativity or innovation. If, however, "you are giving negative feedback, it should be about the process rather than the person. So, you can praise what was good about the process, but then you can also analyze what was wrong with the process and what the person can do to increase the likelihood of succeeding next time." (Glei n.d.)

Here are some examples of a manager providing feedback.

A fixed-mindset approach would be saying something like:

“This project turned out just the way we intended. You are a superstar. I knew you had the natural ability, and this is proof of it.”

As opposed to a growth mindset approach of:

“Sudhir, this project turned out very well. I appreciated the way you brought the team together, kept everyone focused, and created a sense of ownership.”

Here are examples of providing constructive criticism.

When a manager is giving criticism, you need to critique the process someone engaged in and discuss what skills the person needs to learn and improve.

Dweck says to use the word “yet.” You can say to someone who fell short: “You do not seem to have this,” but then add the word “yet.” As in, “You do not seem to have these skills... yet.” By doing that, we give people a time perspective. It creates the idea of learning over time. It puts the other person on that learning curve and says, “Well, maybe you are not at the finish line, but you are on that learning curve, and let’s go further.” (Glei n.d.)

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