



Treat Employees As Assets

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com

How many businesses could be successful without people? The obvious answer is none. People are necessary to the success of any business. Yet how many managers view their people as liabilities versus assets? How many organizations focus on managing the costs of their employees versus investing in them? How much of your organization's attention is on employee development and retention versus performance management?

While most managers implicitly know how valuable their employees are to the success of their business, especially their top employees, they often invest very little in them. Instead, they strive to see how much they can get out of them with as little investment as possible. I worked with a company once that viewed their employees not just as liabilities, but as easily interchangeable liabilities. The company's senior management put most of their attention into processes and controls that would enable them to plug people into positions and replace them at will. The result was an organization of underutilized people with low morale which consistently underperformed.

Employees are assets. Organizations, especially those in retail, are dependant on employees for competitive differentiation. Employee's knowledge, attitude and skills in large part provide an organization with its key points of differentiation. Organizations with highly skilled and knowledgeable employees have a tremendous competitive advantage.

As a manager, one of your top priorities should be the continuous development of your employee assets. This involves focus in three areas.

First, your employees should be assigned to roles that maximize their strengths. People are unique. They each bring different capabilities to your organization. Get to know your employees and build reasonable flexibility into their assignments that enable them to leverage what they do best. Organizations that leverage the unique capabilities of their employees have a much higher overall capability than those that don't.

Two, invest in employee training and development. High performing organizations offer training and education opportunities to their employees. Set minimum training requirements such as one or two weeks per year for each employee. Help them identify training areas that would enable them to be more effective. Without ongoing training and education, employees fall behind on industry and management best practices.

Three, coach your employees. Coaching has emerged as a management approach that obsoletes many management practices prevalent just ten to twenty years ago. Coaching is much more effective than telling or directing. Coaching gets at root cause issues that prevent employees from reaching their peak potential. It helps them uncover and overcome obstacles. It promotes deep understanding. Like mentoring, it creates a long lasting impact. Managers who coach their employees see much quicker employee development and overall higher performance.

To ensure your organization operates at its peak potential, ensure your employees operate at theirs. Invest in them. Ensure they are in optimal roles. Offer training and education appropriate to their needs and position. Coach them toward best practices and principles that reinforce their training and on-the-job learning.